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Photograph Phil, the Boy Sleuth; or, Rosebud Rob's Reappearance.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.



Now he poises the red-hot brand, and then pushes it savagely against the breast of Photograph Phil. As Diuena removed the instrument of torture, a livid "40" stood revealed upon his breast.

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CHAPTER I.

PHOTOGRAPH PHIL—A BOY OF THE PERIOD, AND HIS
ROGUE'S GALLERY.

"Oh! Photograph Phil
Is a glorious Phil;
A boy of the period, you bet!
And the coins he takes in,
Are not earned by sin,
But made by the brow of his sweat!"

"Yes, pilgrims, Photograph Philip am I—a wonder of the nineteenth century—a marvel for two or several continents. Walk up, ye benign-faced descendants of the ape—ramble hitherward, ye anglers for their golden grub, and behold the various peculiarities of yer humble servant—then smile, on realizing that you have blundered plum squar' upon the Mecca of your sanguine anticipations—that you have found a *Multum in Parvo*, right hayr in the city of Cascade.

"Feller-citizens, I am not a public lecturer, aiming at a position in the Capitol, neither am I a quack cure-all for all diseases and afflictions, as ye might all suppose. No, sir, my intelligent hearers, I am none of these, but something grander—a spontaneous outburst of effusive nature, sandwiched with seven pounds of brains, and more tongue than mortal man e'er had before.

"Is there any pilgrim, with thoughts so base or motives so evil, as would durst say I had not the right to wield my gabby appliance for my special earthly maintenance? No! three hundred and fifty thousand times no! In the words of the poet:

"A man may dress in garments rough,
Or dress in habiliments sleek;
He cannot be a gospel tough,
Without a plenty o' cheek."

"Allow me ter add, geolorious apples of my eye, that the poet had glued his gaze upon me when he wrote those poetical lines. Oh! bewhiskered monarchs of the pick, let me impress it deeply upon your minds, that I am a great sensation—a combined world's fair, rivaling either the Centenyal or Barnum's sarcuss. I am the coming man, the conqueror of science, the professor of the American sleuths. Behold in me, oh! mighty hosts, the son of a seventh son! A man whose understanding surpasseth thine own, even though mine years number but in the nineteenth column of life. Look at me—slap your optics straight upon me, ye suspicious mortals, and apprise me ef ye see in me anything unnatural—if I am particularly a monstrosity, a mermaid or a cat-fish?

"*Humbug?* Where did I hear that whisper, then? It wafted unto me like the cackle of an eight-day heifer! Where is the man who durst say I am not—a boy of the period, a vagabond, a scamp? Where is that pilgrim who durst aver that I am not a beat, a sleuth, a snoozer, gifted with a gab like unto perpetual motion? Hooray! the idea of a nineteen-year-old sharp, attracting such a vast concourse of people, who stand with bated breath and fly-traps apace, listening to the discordant notes of a Boy of the Period—a graceless scamp, who has tried his hand at nearly every trade and profession, from cheating babies out of their bottle of milk to murdering blind mice out of pure cussedness.

"Here you all stand, with your hands in your pockets, and grotesque grins upon faces—buns, bulwhackers, and beats, all taking in what I say, and wondering wot I am about to do. Oh! ye poor half-witted sons of sea-cooks! be prepared to be astounded! dumbfounded! agitated as by a gigantic earthquake! Be ye in readiness, I say, to be demoralized and panic-stricken by me, the wonder of the nineteenth century, when I reveal unto you the secrets of my visit here.

"Gaze at me! protrude your eyeballs at me! watch the incessant and mechanical motion of my tongue! Allow me to assure you that it is all my own. Political parties have even engaged me to harangue to mighty multitudes, and, as a result, there are ninety indictments standing against me for talking suntry senators and sardines to death. I have actually the assurance that I can stand here and talk longer and gas you longer than any mortal man extant.

"As I said before, gaze at me! You behold an ordinary chap, five feet four high, weighing a hundred and forty pounds—a saucy-looking, independent chap—and the biggest rascal east o' the settin' sun. I stand upon a dry-goods box, in the main streets of Cascade City, surrounded by a multitude of people—a hard crowd o' 'citizens,' at the best. Behind me, upon the dry-goods box, stand several frames, and an object covered with a blanket, which might be a sewing-machine, a camera, or a surveyor's instrument. It is the middle of the three—a photograph-machine, for taking the pictures of man or beast, with equal accuracy and dispatch.

"Here, let me arrange the frames, and unvail them. There! you see you have pictures of four hundred individuals, distinct from each other. I call this my rogue's gallery, and these are my

rogues. Every man you see there pictured is a consummate rascal, with a reward set upon his head. Walk up and gaze at the artistic collection! It costs you nothing to look upon the features of brother-beats and scamps. Ten to one, every man in the crowd is a villain—a ruffian of the deepest hair-dye! I have come here that you might have the chance to add your faces to the distinguished collection. Here are kings, ministers, gamblers, deacons, merchants, theater dead-heads, beer-guzzlers, stage-drivers, tramps, and photographers, all as natural as life. Walk up, pilgrims! and view the collection. Maybe you'll see the face of some dear relative, and I can sell you a duplicate for the moderate sum of a dollar!"

The crowd surged forward to get a peep at the collection, which the young sharp had so gabbily announced in his peculiar harangue.

The eccentric individual had quite described the scene; let us devote a little space in describing him. He was a well-formed youth, about nineteen years of age, attired in a stylish suit of gray, with pantaloons tucked in his boot-tops, and a battered "plug" hat cocked upon one side of his head, after rowdy style. His whole appearance was that of a flashy, bejeweled jockey, except you were to digest former impressions, in order to make room for new ones.

It was a strange face, that of this Boy of the Period, as he had aptly styled himself. There was an expression of good nature in the prominent lineaments, as well as signs suggestive of a cunning and an independent, dare-devil disposition, and a will firmer than rock. His features were of ordinary mold, with firm chin, fat, health-tinted cheeks, and a mouth ever haunted with a waggish expression or a smile. The eyes were blue, keen and sparkling, the forehead high, the hair brown and curling close to the skull. This gave him a strange appearance, as viewed among the straight and long-haired miners of the town.

Whence he had come none knew, except that the stage had brought him into the town, with a superfluity of trunks and boxes; and now, under the moonlight of the early autumnal evening, with its soft Indian summer breezes, he had gathered about him such a crowd as ne'er before had assembled in the main street of the town—or city.

For the town of Cascade City has made rapid strides since we bade it adieu in "Idyl, the Girl Miner," to return and chronicle another strange and eventful story of the mines. The monthly moon-tides now came regularly, and covered the gulch-bottom with golden sands, even as the moon filled in the heavens. Consequently, in a few short days, the gulch was a second Deadwood, with its hosts of people, and hundreds of saloons, shanties, stores and tented habitations, wherein dwelt and traded the heterogeneous masses.

Several miners had attempted to trace Cascade creek above the noisy falls, but they had never returned and, as a consequence, others had little desire to try their example.

Changes, too, have come among those whom we have formerly known as characters.

Sir Tom Somerset and his wife Idyl, have gone East, and of all the faces we see in the crowd which surrounds the sharper, Photograph Phil, there are but two we recognize.

One of these is Baltimore Bess!

The girl dare-devil herself, as natural as life, with the same coolness which has given her her fame—the same bountiful supply of "brass," so much needed, if one expects success in the Far West. Bess stands and gazes admiringly at the eccentric Photograph Phil, for he is a novelty in the mines, and evidently no "slouch."

We cast around for the next face which we know. Carefully we gaze over the human sea, but see none familiar in our memory, unless—can it be possible?

Can it be that we are not mistaken in that fellow, not far from Bess—the bleary-eyed, red-nosed, raggedly-attired bummer, whose legs seem unable to support him, and whose drunken hiccoughs and exclamations are the cause of many a shout of laughter?

A new "citizen" in the town, is he, evidently, for nobody seems to know him. At the best he is a filthy-looking, greasy old wretch, with unkempt hair and beard—no, we are sure, now, that we have never seen him before. It was a faint gleam in his preternaturally bright eyes, which called back the recollection of another.

"Hic! hur-r-rah-er!" this individual would shout, occasionally. "I say (hic!), young feller, d'ye know me? D'ye (hic!) ever remember o' takin' my forty-graff?"

"Most noble duke, I am sorry to aver that I never had that honor!" Photograph Phil, replied, with a grin. "Although I've photographed nearly all the crowned heads of Europe, I never had the opportunity of taking your most sublime phiz."

"No! I guess-er not, young feller. I (hic!) guess-er not. D'ye know me (hic!)—ye know who I am?"

"Ain't the Grand Duke Alexis, are you?"

"No! guess-er not!" the old bummer muttered, scratching his head through the crownless part of his old hat, as if to dig up the roots of remember-ance—"guess-er not."

"Ne Dom Pedro, the emperor?"

"Ye-es—Dom Pedro—dom it (hic!) as much as ye please, young feller. I (hic!) play pedro, an' get (hic!) er beat. D-d-dead broke."

"Oh! maybe you're George Jackson, then?" the Boy Photographer observed.

"N-n-no! Guess-er not. Don't know me (hic!), hey? Well, (hic!) my handle's Bully Ike, now, you b-b-bet (hic!) B-bully Ike, from the six hundredth (hic!) congressional district. I'm a b-b-bruiser, I am (hic!), an' don't ye forgit it—a reg'lar (hic!)

masher from ther old (hic!) sc'ool. T-t-t-take my (hic!) forty-graff-er, young feller?"

"Wait 'til you're sober, old pilgrim, and spruced up. Then, come around, an' I'll set you off in style. Now, feller-citizens, I guess you've seen ther subjects o' my rogues' gallery 'an' we'll adjourn 'til tomorrow. Then, all I request is a visit from those who desire to have their pictures taken. Thanking you for your kind attention, I will now dismiss you."

As the show was evidently over for the time being, the crowd began to disperse, and soon the stand lately occupied by the lively-tongued photographer was cleared of its freight, which had been transported to a boxed wagon, drawn up at one side of the trail as if for repairs; while a superannuated mule grazed close at hand.

The boy artist had, in the meantime, wandered through the town, with no intent, evidently, except to see the sights; for there were many strange ones to be seen in the little mining strike of Cascade City. Saloons, dance-houses, and gaming-hells flourished at every hand, and, in some instances, the three occupations were confined to one building. This is generally the case in most of the Black Hills towns.

Cascade City also now boasted of a real theater, which was a large frame shanty, and was designated as "The Home of Mirth." The performance generally consisted of negro minstrelsy, a few grotesquely-mounted farces, and a blood-curdling afterpiece.

Into this establishment Photograph Phil paid his way, in preference to whiling away his leisure in the saloons, which furnished the only accommodations for "children in the wilderness" or "green-ies" and "tender-foots," as all new-comers to the mines were unceremoniously dubbed, unless they were "veterans of the cradle."

Passing inside, the young photographer managed to obtain a seat, although the place was packed. He was not a little surprised to find the performance of a less immoral nature than that of many of the Eastern variety-halls, and after he had thoroughly enjoyed a part of the programme he left the place, with the intention of returning after getting a breath of fresh air.

But an event unforeseen prevented his return. Just outside, he was touched upon the arm by a young female, poorly dressed, with a bit of shawl over her head in place of a hat.

"Please, sir, would you be so kind as to give me a few pennies? Mother is very sick—brother was killed last week, and we have nothing to eat, nor no money."

It was a plaintive, childish voice, even though the speaker was full-sized—very pretty, both of face and form, Photograph Phil thought from what he could see of her in the gloom, which reflected from the theater.

"What is your name and where do you live?" he asked, eying her keenly; for, though young in years, he had grown worldly wise, and knew of the deception practiced upon the unwary, even in the wilderness.

"My name, sir, is Millicent Vere," the girl replied, after a trifle of hesitation. "We live in a cabin down the gulch."

"Thank you. If you will permit me to accompany you to your home, I will willingly give you aid!" Phil said, politely. "If I find that you are worthy of assistance, I shall gladly render you any assistance in my power."

"You are very kind, sir, but I would much rather you would not come—at least not yet. Good-evening—excuse me, for the intrusion."

"But, say, hold up!" Phil remonstrated, rather authoritatively. "Jest don't git in a hurry." And fumbling in his vest pocket, he drew forth a roll of bills, and thrust them into the pretty beggar's hands. "There you are, miss—guess there's enough to keep you from starvation awhile. 'Sh! no words about it, now—just salt onto it and bounce. When I give a charity layout, I give it, you bet, and don't allow no back talk, neither, begging your pardon all the same, for my rude speech. Take the money, freely, and go on your way, rejoicing."

"But—but, sir, you are robbing yourself—you—"

"Git out!" the Boy of the Period said, with a chuckle. "Why, that's nothing—I am rich."

"Anyhow, I thank you very much," Millicent Vere said, gratefully. "I shall try to repay you. Before I go will you tell me to whom I am indebted?"

"They call me Photograph Phil, miss. As for being indebted, get out!"

Millicent bowed, with a murmur of thanks, and turning hurried away, swiftly, down the gulch.

She presently emerged into the moonlight, and the boy stood gazing after her, noting with appreciative eye her gracefulness, and trim, willow form.

"I told her I was rich!" he muttered, "and so I am in a superfluity of tongue, brains, and cheek, I believe. But certainly not in gold, when the money I gave her constituted my whole fortune, with the exception of a few silver pieces. But, pshaw! that hundred dollars will make their hearts gladder than it ever could mine. Photograph Phil has been too long a wait of the world, to fear starvation, when short, a few. Ho! hum! the next thing is to look out for a place to lodge, to-night."

He was about to turn up the street into the main part of the town, when his sharp eye caught sight of "mething lying upon the ground, just where Millicent Vere had stood while addressing him.

He stepped forward, and upon examination found to be a piece of paper. Many would have passed by; but not so with the Boy Sleuth.

He had long since learned to regard trifles as the retaste of greater things.

His father and grandfather had both been detectives, and the profession appeared to be hereditary, for it had descended to Phil in the shape of a pro-

fession, which he had followed during his trip through the American continent.

He now picked up the paper, and bringing it where the moonlight could play upon it, discovered that it contained the impression, in black ink, of a skull and cross-bones, and also a black belt or band. Inside this band were the three letters, "T. of B."

"Well, I'll be shot if there isn't something queer here!" Phil muttered. "I don't believe there is a drug-store in the place that owns so peculiar a label. Probably it is the sign or password of some secret organization that has its existence here. But how did it come here? The girl may or may not have dropped it—probably not. Let me see: what does T. of B. stand for?—Tim of Ballwhack—Temple of Bacchus—hello! Now, that I come to think, there is a place up the gulch here which bears that same name. I wonder if this applies to it in any way?"

As he gave vent to these mutterings, he wandered along up the street, and soon paused in front of a small shanty better finished than its neighbors, and over the door was painted in dull letters:

"TEMPLE OF BACCHUS."

It was not an inviting-looking place, for the windows were of red stained glass and the doors closed.

"Phew!" Photograph Phil muttered, as he stood still and gazed about him. "I've a mind to tackle that shebang. If it's nothing more than a saloon, all right—or if it's something else, all right. Haven't I got the pap'rs and sufficient brass to get out? It won't be my first little scrape—that's one consolation."

Watching an opportunity, when some one had partly opened the door for the purpose of peering out, he advanced swiftly and pushed the door further open and stepped inside.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE INITIATION.

"THEIR coolest cuss in ther mines!"

The exclamation came from a brawny, fat-legged individual, of rough appearance, who stood leaning against the bar of the "Disillery," one of the most popular resorts in Cascade City. He was surrounded by a knot of men of similar appearance, whose blue or red shirts and long, bristling beards proclaimed them to be miners.

"Yes, sir-ee! that same galoot aire ther coolest cuss in the mines!" the first speaker averred, as if to make the impression strike more forcibly upon his audience. "If I war a good Samaritan, w'ich I ain't, I'd like ter see that Sport git rich an' married off."

"Pshaw! guess ye don't know his calibre, do ye?" grunted Mattice, the barkeeper, as he mopped off the counter with a filthy rag. "That Rosebud Rob hed ther ch'ice o' one o' ther purtiest gals ye evey sot eyes on, when ther 'citement fust broke out hayr, an' he wouldn't take it, hang me if he would."

"Ye don't mean ter say et, thether Sport yonder, w' a rosebud in his buttonhole, refused ter fine in double harness w' a pretty petticoater?"

"He jest did that same."

"Cuss him! He ought ter be shot!" and the miner emphasized his views by pounding the counter smartly with his fist, which was a huge mass of bone and flesh. "Whar's ther pilgrim as wants ter marry me off ter a good-lookin' feminine—oh, whar is he, ther brute?"

The center object of the foregoing conversation now came forward from the inner room, where he had been watching the dancers, of whom there were some two score upon the floor, of both sexes.

Rosebud Rob, the Spotter Sport.

He needs no reintroduction to the Half-Dime readers, to whom he has made former appearances.

The same coolly handsome Sport he was yet, with his elegant make-up, rivaling that of a Broadway swell. Everything he wore was the best of its line, and you had the Spotter Sport's photograph.

"Ah! good-evening, gents!" he saluted, as he sauntered up, with a bow. "I presume you are enjoying yourself, this evening?"

"Waal, who said contrary?" the big miner grunted. "Who'd I heer mention fight?"

"It might have been me!" Rosebud Rob replied, with a smile. "Somehow fighting material is rather scarce, to-night, and bravado is below par."

He then sauntered on into the gambling-saloon, where all kinds of games were running in full blast.

Seating himself at the table just vacated by a couple of miners, he lit a cigar, and watched those around him, sharply.

There were men in the room whom he suspected belonged to the famous Joaquin, Jr.'s, band, but by no action did they reveal anything to warrant his suspicion.

Baltimore Bess came in, after a while, and occupied a chair opposite the Sport. She was looking very pretty in her semi-feminine hunting costume, with the hat set jauntily upon her flowing hair, and top boots reaching to her knees.

There was a healthful flush upon her cheeks, and a fascinating expression to her eyes, which ever caused the Sport to regard her with admiration; and sometimes he pondered, and wondered why it was she had come out into the mines in the guise of a dare-devil, when she was fitted for a higher station in life.

For he had long since found that her rough language was but simulated, for when she chose she used as good Webster as any ordinary mortal.

"Well," she said, interrogatively, "what is the news?"

"None to speak of," Rob replied, with a yawn.

"It is getting monotonous here."

"So they are. Did you see the photographer who got that picture?"

"Yes, from a distance."

"He is a brick. Can talk more in less time than a dozen photographers."

"Getting that pretty steep, are you not, Bess, gal?"

"No, not a bit. But, something else fetched me here, Mr. Mapleton. What do you think about the Temple of Bacchus down here in the gulch?"

"The Temple of what?"

"The Temple of Bacchus."

"I am sure I don't know. What is there peculiar about the place?"

"Well, just cast your eye at it when you pass next time. It is kept under lock and key, and no one is ever seen to enter or leave it."

"Umph! that is strange. I'll remember your suggestion, Bess," as the girl dare-devil arose to go.

Let us return to Photograph Phil, whom we left after he had pushed the door open and stepped inside the Temple of Bacchus.

He found himself in a little vestibule, dimly lighted by a sputtering candle, and confronted by a masked man, who held in his hand a cocked revolver.

The door was instantly slammed shut; and Phil was alone with his savage-looking confronter.

"Hist! no noise!" the masked man ordered, peremptorily. "What brings you here, young man?"

"What is that your business?" Phil demanded. "Don't I belong to this hayr lodge?"

"Let's see your slip, then!" was the gruff command, for the man evidently disbelieved this parry.

Not a little doubtful as to the result, Phil produced the paper he had found in front of the theater, and handed it over. After scrutinizing it a moment the guard returned it, with a grim "humph."

"Pass on!" he said; "I guess it's all right. You'd better never try the front door again, however."

Phil nodded, and passed on down a dusky hall, along the walls of which were racks containing all sorts of masks, and hooded black cloaks.

"If I ain't in a scrape this time, you can sell me out for a cent!" he muttered, dubiously, as he paused before a rack containing a large black gown and mask.

"I've got to make a debut of some kind, and I calculate I might as well collar one of the turn-outs. Was ever man in such a fix before?"

Not without considerable uneasiness he managed to envelope himself in the huge gown, and affixed the mask to his face, after drawing the hood over his head.

As he viewed himself in a mirror near at hand, he was startled at his own appearance. No spook in black ever looked more frightful than he.

The next act was to enter the door to the main apartment of the building, which he did, his teeth set, and his mind fully made up that he would see the elephant after making this lunge into the mysteries, or burst.

As he entered the apartment, he glanced nervously around him.

There was much to surprise him.

The room was large, and was both plastered, papered, and carpeted.

Long benches were scattered here and there about common deal tables.

Upon these benches, figures arrayed the same as Phil himself, were engaged in playing cards, under the dim light of lamp chandeliers, which pended from the ceiling.

Further in the middle of the room was a large platform dais, well carpeted and ornamented by a revolving stool, upon which sat another grim masked figure.

A strange, sibilant hiss seemed to emanate from this party as Photograph Phil entered, and mechanically each and every figure arose, and a double score of accusing fingers were pointed at the intruder.

"Consarn their pictures!" Phil muttered, under his breath, "what do they mean? Reckon I've stumbled upon a lot of mummies, like Rip Van Winkle, in the play. Wonder what a fellow's to do, anyhow. Guess I'll waltz for'a'd, and kneel before the old shellbark on the turn-table stool, and see what he's got to say for himself."

Vaguely wondering what the result would be, Phil summoned up his courage, and marched boldly forward and dropped upon one knee before the dais, then arose and stood with folded arms before the unknown master of these strange beings and surroundings.

"Hal! thou art punctual, Cross-Bones!" came the words, in a deep, hoarse tone of voice. "What news for thy brethren bringest thou?"

"None, chief!" Photograph Phil replied, in a disguised voice. "The information for which I sought was not to be had."

"Why address me as 'chief,' sir private? Dost thou not recognize the difference between me and thy high-commander, Diablo?"

"Ay, I readily perceived the difference, your honor, but chose to call you chief, because thou art acting in the place of the great Diablo!"

At this juncture, Photograph Phil became suddenly aware that he had made a great blunder, for there was an instant hiss from the masked gamblers, and a series of revolver clicks! and the young adventurer had but to glance around to find that a score of six-shooters were leveled at his head.

While the figure upon the whirling stool suddenly robed upon his feet, stern and grim, in his uncouth robe and mask.

"Impostor!" he hissed, fiercely, "we trapped for you and caught you. I am Diablo, and you are not the spy, Cross-Bones, whom we sent out from our midst."

"Well, supposin' I ain't? What are you going to do about it, anyhow?" Phil demanded, tearing off his mask.

"My autographical signature is Photograph Phil,

every time, and if you want anything of me, jest speak out!"

A stronger hiss came from the mysterious crowd, followed by a groan.

"Oh! you needn't hiss and groan, as if you had swallowed an overdose of goose and mince pie!" Phil continued, seeing that no one offered to argue the point with him. "You can't scare me worth a cent. I'm proof against sech foolery. If you're blacklegs, say so, and I shall be most happy to take your photographs."

"Thou art a stranger, whose wit hath led thee to penetrate into the Infernal Forty tribunal," the figure upon the throne spoke. "Therefore, unless thou taketh oath as a brother, thou art a dead man. We are just forty favored sons of the devil, all working to one end—fory, just—no more. If a man is admitted, he is put through the initiation, and we mark him. He then draws lots with such a man of the band as a jury shall name, and if he wins he lives, a pledged member of the Black Band, who are doomed forever to labor for the God of Gold, under the earth, while the other member dies, and vice versa!"

Phil nodded grimly.

"Go on," he said, coolly.

"Thou, the intruder, hast the choice of two chances. Either thou art to subject thyself to instant death, or submit to the terrible initiations of our Infernal Brotherhood. Which will you have? Will you be a servant unto the God of the Christian or a slave of me, the great Diablo?"

Photograph Phil gave vent to a speculative whistle, and was somewhat alarmed at his position. This was a little the tightest fix he remembered of ever having been in. He had the choice—of death, or of joining what he had already decided was a band of robbers and ruffians!

He had little doubt but that they would kill him, should he refuse to join. And would not the joining of so infamous and mysterious an order be nearly as bad? Besides, he should then have to draw lots with a fellow-mortal for life or death.

He took some time to turn the matter over in his mind before he made any reply to the chief's questions.

Altogether it was a terrible scrape, and he wished himself well out of it. But it was like wishing for the world to come to an end. Death by the pistol, or a living death, literally stared him in the face. He had the choice of two evils, as it were.

The first-named, he at once decided, would be the one not to accept. Better to join the band, as he would have still another chance for life, and, if he won, it would be easy to escape. These were the thoughts which flitted through his mind, to be interrupted by the coarse, unnatural voice of the masked chief, Diablo.

"Come! time is up; make your choice without any more hesitation!" he cried. "You will accept—

which?"

"I will join your band!" Photograph Phil replied, deliberately. "As I don't care about bein' put in under the ground for awhile yet, it seems my only turn."

"Thou hast chosen wisely!" Diablo said, with a horrible chuckle. "The devil rejoiceth when he catches a fish like you."

"Or a sucker like yourself," Phil retorted, with a laugh.

But a strange, sibilant hiss from the band seemed to indicate that they did not relish the point of the joke; but the chief chuckled audibly, his burning eyes fastened upon the Boy Sleuth in a gaze that was anything but pleasant.

"Brethren of the Infernal Forty," he said to the band, "thou beholdest here a new candidate for position in thy ranks. You all know the rules of our devilish and unprincipled order—where a new applicant is sent in, either the applicant or one from your midst, must die. An election is held to see who shall be the man to draw straws with the new candidate. Such an election will now be held. First, however, let the new candidate be disarmed, and his feet bound, until he is ready for initiation."

Several of the outlaws advanced upon Photograph Phil, who threw up his arms and allowed them to go through his clothing, but they failed to find weapons of any sort. He was seated upon one of the benches, and his feet securely bound, so that he could not walk. When this was accomplished, the chief, Diablo, descended from his throne, if such the dais might be called, carrying in his hand a box.

"Let every man get ready to cast his vote!" he ordered. "Every man shall write upon a piece of paper the name of the man that is, in his opinion, the best prepared to die, and drop the vote into the box. The name receiving the most votes shall be the man to draw straws with the new candidate."

A strange, unnatural silence prevailed in the room. Each man received a blank slip of paper from Diablo, and betook himself to a different part of the room, wherein to write out some fellow-mortal's death-warrant.

Photograph Phil sat looking on, wondering what the issue would be. It was all a new phase of crime, although he had been familiar with the different orders of crime and criminals, ever since, when his father, (since dead), had used him as a ferret to get into holes and dens, where older men could not obtain access, especially detectives.

Each man, in the thirty-nine voters, seemed to wish their next neighbor to remain in ignorance as to whom they cast their vote for, and accordingly they separated, to write their death-message.

The chief Diablo seated himself at one of the tables, with the box before him, and when the masked brethren had written their votes, they passed by the table in single file and dropped them into the box, retiring thereafter to a respectful distance, where they awaited, while Diablo counted the votes.

He went over them, carefully, sorting out each man's vote by itself, or, that is, stacking names in different piles.

Two men seemed to have more votes than all the rest combined, and it looked doubtful which of the two would come in ahead, so even were their respective stacks.

Two pair of evil eyes, in the meantime, were leveled alternately upon the table, and at Photograph Phil, who came to the conclusion that they belonged to the men who were, one or the other, destined to be his opponent, in the pull of death.

After the last vote had been stacked, and Diablo arose, with a suppressed chuckle in his voice, there was a moment of deathly silence. Seemingly not a man moved or breathed, but stood with bated breath awaiting the issue.

Diablo finally spoke:

"The votes have been counted, and it falls to Diuena, the Spaniard, to pull the death-straws. Seize him, knights, and bind him, that he may do no one injury; then prepare to give the new candidate his initiation. What is your name, young man?"

"Photograph Phil, at your service!"

"Very well, sir. Steel your heart to pain, and prepare yourself for the excruciating agonies of our infernal torture!"

"Go ahead!" Phil replied. He was resolved that if others could live through the torture, he could, too. Besides he was beginning to regain something of his old confidence, and saucy coolness.

His ever-working mind had not been idle, and he came to the conclusion that if he ever got out of this unhealthy scrape, it must be by the unlimited allowance of "cheek" which had hitherto floated him along with the world's restless tide.

Preparations were made according to Diablo's orders.

The man Diuena was seized, bound and disarmed, and thrown upon the floor.

Two of the brethren approached Photograph Phil, and tightly bandaged his eyes so that it was impossible for him to see. Cotton was then stuffed into his ears, and he was seized bodily, and carried about the room by the head and heels, while the whole gang followed in his wake, howling in a frightful manner, making a din that he could hear, although, to him, it was but a faint, indescribable pandemonium of sound.

After awhile he was laid upon the floor, but was speedily seized again and raised, but this time upon a blanket, from which he was unceremoniously bounced into the air and caught again. Shall we attempt to describe the feelings of the Boy Sleuth, during this interesting performance? Our pen would eventually fail us in depicting the strange and varied sensations which he experienced. Sometimes he was awed, and perhaps a little angered.

But, he managed to repress any exhibition of his true feelings, and literally "grinned and bore it."

The bouncing process was finally finished, and he was stood upon his feet, and stripped of his upper garments, to the waist.

Then there was a strange silence!

What was going to happen?

What new mode of torture was to be adopted by these ruffians, who styled themselves the Infernal Forty?

Ha! the chief now speaks, his hoarse, cruel voice bearing a spice of devilish exultation in its tone.

"Bring forth the red-hot 'forty,' and mark our man, for life!"

There was a hiss from the men, then the bandage was torn from the eyes of the Boy Sleuth.

He started with a cry of alarm and horror, at the awful sight that was presented to his gaze!

CHAPTER III.

A MAIDEN IN DISTRESS—THE INEVITABLE THREE OF A KIND.

OUT under the moonlight of that same eventful night, the gulch was crowded with miners and adventurers—a heterogeneous mass of people who were hurrying to and fro, or gathered in knots, conversing upon the main topics of the day. The sharper—the bullwhacker—the gambler-tough—the well-dressed speculator from the East—the scout—the plodding, big-hearted miner—the border ruffian—the red-skin and Chinaman—all were here, in this one golden gulch, occasionally varied with a female, who was either the wife or daughter of some miner, or an adventuress, whose presence was of no particular account.

The night was balmy for November, and the moonlight enchanting enough to warrant lovers in taking a romantic stroll. But very few lovers were there in this lively town of Cascade City—unless they were all lovers together and of one thing—gold.

What a scene was that presented there under the full rays of the great soaring moon!

In one place, two brutal toughs were engaged in a rough-and-tumble combat with knives, ringed in by a crowd of admiring friends.

In another place, the wily Eastern three-card-monte man had pitched his stand under the dome of the moonlit heavens, and was playing game with abundant success to himself.

Man after man crowded around this new sensation, and many a poor fool put down his last pouch of dust upon the cards with the hope that he was going to win. But all in vain. He lost every time, while the gambler won every time, and shoved the proceeds down into his pockets with a complacent chuckle.

He was a brawny individual, with a superabundance of fat on his limbs and in his florid face, and was dressed in the fantastic costume of a sporting gent from Texas.

His eyes were particularly sinister in their expression, and he boasted of such a monstrous mustache as but few men could cultivate, it being full and thick, of a sandy hue, and the ends, fully two feet in length, were thrown back over his shoulder. Altogether he was a remarkable-looking man, and it was his mustache, perhaps, that drew so large a crowd about him.

"Now, don't be offish, gentlemen!" this man cried, with a complacency of voice that was designed to be encouraging. "Don't get skeert, or, as my name's Colonel Bill Sandford, I'll pull up stakes an' go ter blazes afore I'll stay in this yere town. See hyar! jest as easy ter pick up ther winnin' card as ter eat bufler meat. Look at me, now! Watch my every move and motion, and I'll flip the pasteboards with my eyes shut, and pick up the Queen of Hearts before I open them!"

And the "Colonel" kept his promise, and not only picked up the card, but likewise astonished the "natives."

"No use of backing out because you fail once, fellow-citizens. All is done simply by the twist of your wrist. Ha! ha! what is money, anyhow, compared with sport? Fellow-mortals, I am always happy! You never see me down in the mouth because I lose a friend, or every cent I'm worth. I should be just as cheerful, sitting at this moment on the banks of the Pacific Ocean, a thousand miles from nowhere, with but a crumb of bread in my pocket, as I am now, here with such an intelligent set of stupid. Walk up now! Where's the man as dare buck ag'in' fate?"

"Here, every time!" exclaimed a voice, and the Sport Rosebud Rob stepped forward with a cool smile. "Here I am, Sir Monte Knight, and I have come to make you lame!"

"Colonel" Sandford gave vent to a prolonged whistle as he caught sight of the Sport. He recognized him by a description he had previously received of the Sport, and a twinkle of satisfaction came into his sinister eyes.

Rosebud Rob swaggered forward, his silk hat cocked to one side, glasses bridged upon his nose, and lavender kids upon his hands. The rest of his make-up was in accordance with the character he represented, and he was the impersonation of a handsome band-box dandy.

"Aw! I say, weally, did you—aw—speak to me, sir?" he inquired, squinting reflectively through one eye-glass at the gambler. "Did I—aw—understand you to say that you—aw—would like to flip the—aw—cards with me?"

"Waal, now, you bet I could skin ye in about five minutes by the moon!" the Texan assured, complacently. "But I'll take compassion on you, young feller, an' advise ye not ter buck ag'in' a comet—a regular solid rock practitioner. Ye better go d'rect yer attention ter ther cultivation o' rosebud-an' parfoomery. Ye'll make more outen it than ye could buckin' ag'in' my three-keerd monte table. Ye ken't flip a card worth two cents!"

A murmur of applause ran through the crowd, for strong was the feeling of admiration for this gambler with the ferocious mustache, among the "citizens." Stronger than ever had been their liking for the cool, dauntless Sport, who meted out justice to the deserving, and was regarded as a mortal who worked on the "square."

"Aw! you weally don't say so!" Rosebud Rob drawled affectedly, with a yawn. "You are deucedly clever with your praises, you know; but, aw! start the game and we will see!"

"Queen of Hearts is to be the winning card!" Bill Sandford announced, expertly throwing the three pasteboards upon the table. "What will ye do, ye little sleek bantam?"

"I'll deposit a hundred dollars that I can pick up the 'queen,' aw!" Rob announced, counting out a stack of greenbacks. "Will you cover it, aw! sir gambler?"

"On course!" the Texan replied, triumphantly stacking an equal sum upon the Sport's "chips." "Go ahead, ye durned, bleedin' Yank, an' nominate yer keerd!"

"Aw! anything to accommodate you, aw!" the Sport replied, with a chuckle, and picking up the card nearest to him, he held up the "Queen of Hearts."

Col. Bill Sandford uttered a curse.

A murmur of applause came from the crowd.

While the Sport serenely removed and wiped his eye-glasses.

"Hang you!" Sandford growled, "you only blundered into it. Ten to one you couldn't do et ag'in'!"

"Ho! ho!" Rob sneered. "It's all done simply by a twist of your wrist, you know. You never see me down in the mouth—oh, no! not muchly. Bess?"

"Here I ar', pard!" and the girl dare-devil pushed forward from among the crowd. "What'll ye hev wi' sugar in it?"

"I want you to hold my money!" Rosebud Rob replied, sarcastically. "D'ye see that individual across the table, who sports the enormous mustache?"

"Do I?" Bess said, closing one eye obliquely, and regarding the gambler coolly. "Wai, I recky I do, thet same. Ye mean the chap wi' er hoss's tail sproutin' frum 's upper jaw?"

"The same. Now, ye see, he is an expert gambler, come down here to fleece these gullible citizens of Cascade Gulch out of their hard earnings. Therefore, it behooves me, as a guardian angel o' the peace, to sail in and bu'st his bank!"

"Kerwhoo! Jest my sanctimonious thoughts, exactly!" Baltimore Bess assented. "Beat the ducats of ar out of him."

"Colonel" Bill Sandford from Texas, scowled savagely, and seized the cards fiercely, and shuffled them.

"Ye Yankee Brag!" he taunted. "I'll go ye a

thousand dollars ag'in' a thousand that ye ken't pick up the Queen of Hearts this time, one trial."

"Stack your chips!" Rosebud Rob cried. "I'll either loosen the strings to your purse, or go bu'sted. Bess, gal, can you lend me a hundred, to fill out my pile? I seem to be a little behind the stake."

"Waal, now, I shouldn't weather!" and reaching into a buck-skin pocket, the girl dare-devil drew forth a handful of gold coins, two of which she gave to Rosebud Rob, who then deposited his wager.

The crowd now surged eagerly nearer, for this was momentous and extraordinary gambling, such as was not of everyday occurrence.

Sandford shuffled the cards with unusual care, and was not a little nervous, for it was seldom that he met so dangerous an opponent.

He had been one of the wealthiest monte gamblers in the West, but had lost nearly all in a disastrous speculation, lately, and had come to Cascade City with but a matter of fifteen hundred dollars in pocket, hoping to retrieve his vanished fortunes.

But, from all indications, he had tackled the wrong man.

For although he threw the cards in as dextrous a manner as he knew how, the Sport picked up the fatal "queen," with a laugh, and raked in the stakes.

Sandford swore roundly, and whipped two heavy 45-calibre revolvers from his belt, but before he could raise them, Baltimore Bess had "covered" him.

"No ye don't, Mister Mustacher!" she advised. "Jest ye restore them aire pop-guns to yer belt, or I'm an embodied spirit of Christopher Columbus ef I don't bore a hole through ye quicker'n a cat kin sneeze. I'll allow I'm capable o' keerin' fer this fragrant rosebud, an' kin lick ary man as says he hain't a hull boss!"

"Curse you!" Sandford growled, turning his weapons to their holsters, "curse you, I'll get even with you yet. Gentlemen, the bank's broke, and there will be no more gaming to-day!"

And giving the Sport an ugly look, the man from Texas slunk away among the crowd; while Rosebud Rob smiled good-naturedly, as he shoved his winnings into his pocket.

"I reckon that chap won't play monte again, anyhow!" he said. "At least, not until he get's even with me. An ugly brute to his pride, it was, to be beaten at his own game. Didn't you see him, as he waltzed away? Oh! but he had blood in his eye—likewise gore!—to some extent, coagulated crimson! Oh! yes, muchly! His very soul thirsteth for bloody revenge. Like some Saracen he will upon me with a sword of huge dimensions, and mow me down like a blade of grass."

"No he won't!" Bess assured, with arms akimbo. "See hayr! ain't I on hand? When thet big Texan steers gits on your trail I allow I'll be on hand. Every woman was made specially fer ter be ther natural purtector and guardian of sum man—the guldin' element ter his wild moments—the proppin' hand ter his dispendent spells—the bleedin' o' his pocket-book. That's me, Posey-me, clean thrum frum A to alphabet, you bet! Fate ordained et thet Baltimore Bess should allus be a strong arm o' protection to the weak and innocent!"

"But I'm neither weak nor innocent, Bess, so I relieve you of your self-imposed responsibility," the Sport replied with a smile, as he sauntered away.

Later, a little, feminine cries, and the clatter of hoofs attracted the attention of the throngs in the gulch in the direction of the stage-road which wound down into the valley from the bluffs to the east.

Screams that were fraught with alarm and terror, too, they were, and that echoed and re-echoed upon the silvery moonlit atmosphere of the autumnal night.

A horseman—or, rather, a horsewoman, shot out into view, and was seen spurring a white horse madly down the slopes into the heart of the gulch.

Everybody stares! What is the cause of her fright—her screams—her undue haste!

Ha! As she comes nearer, the cause looms into view not far in the rear in the shape of four horsemen, who are lashing their animals to extraordinary exertions.

Mechanically the crowd surged forward to see the thing through. Revolvers glanced the moonlight in many a hand, and there was an unhealthy outlook for the pursuers of this lone night-fugitive.

As she came before the great breastwork of humanity, she drew rein and ceased her screams—sat erect upon her saddle, her hair pushed back in wild confusion, and her face lit in the streaming moonlight.

An involuntary murmur of admiration ran riot among the great crowd. Such a face had never before been seen in the mines—was not often to be seen in a lifetime, if searched for the world over.

This was a face which possessed the two charms of beauty which cannot be equaled by other fascinations—the charms of exquisite perfection of feature and sweetness of expression.

It was a brilliantly-expressive face of perfect feature, fired by a pair of large brown eyes full of smoldering passion, and half framed in wavy wreaths of chestnut hair.

The eyes wore a startled look now; the maiden's breath came in quick gasps; a burning flush had been aroused in her cheeks by the wild ride.

And although she was scarce more than seventeen, she possessed a form that was willowy and all that was graceful.

A riding-habit of some expensive dress-goods, together with a hat swung by the strings about her neck, and a cloak about her shoulders, constituted her outer garb.

But it was a picture such as those miners and

oughs of Cascade City had never feasted their eyes upon before.

After drawing rein, the eyes of the maiden were turned first upon the coming pursuers, and then appealingly upon the crowd. It was evident that she was too much out of breath to speak.

"What is it, miss?" a big miner asked, whose name was John Mason—a miner, he was, with kindly face and tremendous flowing whiskers. "What's the matter? Be you afraid o' them ar' galeots?"

"Oh, sir! do not let them come up. They are bad, villainous men, who have pursued me here, to force me to stay under the guardianship of a man whom I loathe and fear!" the girl cried, passionately. "I appeal to you as men of honor, not to let those cruel villains touch me."

"That settles it, miss!" cried a cool voice, and who should push forward but the Spotter Sport, Rosebud Rob, closely followed by the dare-devil, Baltimore Bess, and the bummer, Bully Ike. "We're on deck every time when a woman appeals for aid—we, the Mutual Life Protective Association. Eh, Bess?"

"Waal, now, you just bet!" the dare-devil replied. During this short speech the pursuers drew nearer, and the foremost rode close to the horse of the trembling fugitive, and drew rein.

"Thank God, my poor, misguided child, that I have been so successful in finding you!" he said, in an oily tone, and he laid one hand upon her arm. "Come, dear, let us ride out of this crowd, and find a home. By the earliest stage to-morrow we leave on our return to Blackstone Hall, your Virginian home."

"No! no! I will not go! I will not! Let me alone! Help me, somebody! I will not go with this base villain!" the girl fugitive cried, shrinking away in sudden terror. "Oh! God help me!"

"Keereet! His envoy is on hand!" Rosebud Rob announced, stepping forward. "Mr. Whatever-you-may-call-yourself, jest be kind enough to oblige me by taking your dirty paws off from that young lady!"

"Sir, what do you mean?" the new-comer cried, in evident surprise, his clutch still upon the maiden's arm.

"I mean just what I said," the Sport assured, "and if you don't follow my instructions in erbout the twinkling of old Jupiter's left eye, I'll make perforated card-board out o' ye fer ladies ter work motives on, you bet your best chips! My name is Rosebud Rob, if you want to know it—a man to suit all circumstances—an' I've hung bigger men than you!"

"Young man, your insolence is pardonable when I come to regard you in your rude surroundings. But you should use more respect in addressing one of God's servants, for you will readily perceive that I am a minister of the gospel—the Reverend Lucas Alyne, at your service."

Rosebud Rob gave vent to a prolonged whistle, while Baltimore Bess danced about excitedly, her fists doubled up, in warlike array.

"I'll bet he's an old liar!" she proclaimed, vociferously; "two to one he never seed' ther inside o' a church. Luk at that figger-head o' his, will ye? Phe-ee-ew! I thort he was a half 'twixt er Spitz cur and a perarie coyote, darn my stockings if I didn't!"

The crowd cheered at this point, and the Reverend Lucas grew wrathly.

"Tis a shameful disgrace—an insult to the pulpit," he growled.

"Bah! you contemptible hypocrite!" the girl cried, scornfully. "Release me, sir."

"Nay, I will do nothing of the kind," the Virginian hissed, savagely. "Young man, will you put down your weapon and allow me to pass? I am an innocent man in a land that I am unacquainted with. I am willing to do everything that is fair, and if you will call upon me to-morrow, I will show you proof that I am an ordained minister of the gospel, and that I am also guardian of this wayward child, who took a wild notion into her head to leave my house and home on no pretext whatever."

"Tis false!" the girl cried, passionately. "I fled from this monster's house because he insulted me—because he abused me and whipped me when I would not yield to his shameful demands. As God hears me, this is the truth!"

"It is false—utterly false, and a criminal lie against a servant of the Lord!" the Reverend Lucas protested, in holy horror. "My child, will you never see the path of righteousness lying in your way?"

"Not while you are around, you base wretch!" the girl cried, her eyes flashing, vehemently. "You are a hypocrite—a bad, bold man, wearing the cloak of the church to cover your sins—a wolf in sheep's clothing!"

"A regular modern Moor!" snorted the irrepressible Bess. "Say, pilgrims, what a fust-class *loro* driver he'd make—eh?"

"Young lady," Rosebud Rob said, "I believe you, and you shall be freed from him, for a time at least. Your name is—?"

"Jennie Grey, sir. Oh! if you will please make him let go my arm—I—I—he is pinching me with all his strength."

"Let go of her arm, you old devil!" Rob cried, fiercely, and the menacing way in which his revolvers came up to a level, caused the Virginian to relax his hold, with a shudder. "Now, then, Miss Grey, if you will allow me to assist you to alight, I will hunt up a place for you to stay until further arrangements can be made. Bess, old gal, will you shoot this man, if he attempts molestation?"

"You're jest shoutin' I will!" the dare-devil assented, covering the Reverend.

"An' hayr, too!" announced the bummer, Bully Ike, who had become somewhat sobered, by this

time. "I'm one o' ther crowd—ther new candidate frum ther 663rd congressional deestric, an' kin pummel the mug of ary pilgrim fer ther drinks!"

As Rosebud Rob gracefully assisted Jennie Grey to alight the three companions of Alyne, who had halted some distance away, came spurring forward.

One was a dark-complexioned, black-mustached individual of five-and-twenty years, attired in a hunting suit, while upon the faces of his two older companions was plainly written "river roughs."

The younger man, as he drew rein with an oath, also drew a revolver.

"Drop that girl, curse you!" he cried, addressing Rosebud Rob, and covering him with his weapon. "Deliver her back to the saddle, or I'll blow your brains out on the spot!"

"Hold up thar, pilgrim!" Baltimore Bess cried, as she and the bummer, and the miner, John Mason, sprung to the Sport's side. "I'll allow thet three of a kind allus beats two pair, and besides, we've got the crowd to back us!"

And a yell from the crowd sealed the verdict.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE OF THE INITIATION—PHIL A DEMON—AN INFERNAL OUTLAW.

We will now return to the scene wherein we last left Photograph Phil.

As stated, he uttered a startled cry at the sight his gaze rested upon, when the bandage was removed from his eyes.

It was a scene that must have startled the strongest-minded person at first.

The room had been darkened, and before him the Boy Sleuth beheld a couple of human heads perched upon poles, all dripping and gory, as if they had just been cut from bodies.

Beyond these yet, and forming a circle entirely around him, were human skeletons, standing upon the floor, as if possessed of life, while their bony arms and hands were stretched out toward him, and their grinning skulls seemed the impersonation of hideousness, inasmuch as they were surrounded by a phosphorescent halo of light.

Perhaps Phil shuddered a little at first, but he speedily regained his composure enough to realize that all of this business had been arranged with a view to frightening the wits out of him. Accordingly he gave vent to a prolonged whistle, denotive of surprise, followed by a wild laugh.

Instantly there was a hiss, and the skeletons and heads suddenly disappeared through the floor, and Diablo and his imps stood in their place.

The transformation occurred so suddenly that Photograph Phil was unable to tell how it was done, but he rightly concluded, by the aid of traps in the floor.

"Thou didst not fear the doomed spirits of the dead that rose out of Hades?" Diablo said, surprise manifested in his tone.

"Nary a time, yer honor!" Phil replied, with a chuckle. "Guess not! Why, them ar' bones were of no account in scaring me. Say, how much will you take to let me photograph that scene? I could make a fortune out of it."

"Thy fortunes are bound unto me, Diablo, the acting-superintendent for Satan! I own thee, body and soul!"

"The deuce you do! Git out! don't sling your taffy at me in that shape, for I don't swallow it worth a red cent."

"Thou art certainly possessed of a brave heart and a glib tongue, and a valuable acquisition thou art to mine Infernal Forces. Thou hast yet another degree to take before the administration of the oath!"

"All right—shove ahead! If you look for satisfaction in the expectation that I'll weaken, you'll be disappointed, you bet on it!"

"The chief has spoken!" was the grim response, and the man, Diablo, retired to the revolving throne, where he seated himself, with a wave of his hand.

Photograph was next seized and borne to a wooden column which arose from floor to ceiling, near the center of the room, but a few feet from the throne. He was placed with his back to this, with his face fronting toward the throne, and bound, one rope being passed around his ankles, another at his knees, waist, and throat, making him a helpless prisoner.

The whole band, with the exception of Diablo, then passed around and around the pole, chanting, hissing, and groaning, until a whistle from the chief caused them to cease and pair off into line at either hand.

The whistle was also instrumental in bringing forward, from an adjoining room, the man Diuena, bearing a large kettle of live coals, in which were thrust several irons for the purpose of branding. Phil perceived this, and a hard expression came over his features, for he realized that he was to be branded with red-hot irons!

A shudder involuntarily ran through his frame.

He had read of such practices in olden times, but he had never heard of such enormities in civilized America, since the Indians had ceased their hostile depredations along the border.

It was a horror of horrors, truly.

"Ha! ha!" Diablo cried, triumphantly. "We will see the bravo squeal, now. Diuena, you know your work. First the '40' stamp, then the 'skull and cross-bones,' and then the 'fraternity' stamp."

The Spaniard bowed, and an exultant chuckle seemed to come from beneath his mask. It was evident that he thirsted for this opportunity to get rid of his new foe.

Photograph Phil saw this, too, and he set his teeth, firmly determined that not even the most excruciating pain should cause him to cry or give a loud expression of the agony he must endure.

Diuena seized one of the irons from the fire, and approached.

The iron was made in the shape of a 4 and 0, and when imprinted upon anything left the impression of "40." This stamp was six inches in length by four in width, and was at a white heat.

The fair, smooth breast of the young Sleuth was bare, and was prepared to receive the cruel iron; nor could the prisoner have burst the bonds had he tried. Nothing, then, remained for him to do but to bear it to the best of his ability.

His teeth were set like a vise, and his whole frame drawn rigid.

Nearer—nearer came the brander, his eyes gleaming through the mask like coals of fire; his every movement seen fraught with devilish exultance.

Now he poised the red-hot brand, and then pushed it down savagely against the breast of the captive.

The iron burns deep into the quivering flesh—the sputtering of the burning flesh and the sickening stench that arises, but adding to the terrible scene.

At last, apparently satisfied with the pain he had inflicted, Diuena removed his instrument of torture, and stepped back to the kettle.

A livid "40" stood revealed upon the breast of Photograph Phil, seared deep into the skin—a terrible mark, never to be obliterated.

All eyes were instantly raised to the face of the young Sleuth, to note the expression there.

It was a smile of scorn that mantled the coolly composed features of the prisoner.

There was not the least visible shade of pain—no tears, nothing but that mocking smile.

Diablo uttered an admiring oath!

Such grit he evidently had not seen before.

"Diuena, thou needst not mark the forehead of the prisoner!" he said. "Only the body need thy hand touch."

"And why this change, most noble chief?"

"For reasons best known to myself, Sir Imp. Proceed with thy work. Brand the prisoner yet with the skull and cross-bones, and pour salt water over him, after which bring me the oath-book."

The instructions were followed to the letter. The brand made in the shape of a skull and cross-bones was next used upon the Boy Sleuth, who by a superhuman effort—it could scarcely have been less—refrained from groaning or flinching, although the pain caused by the red-hot iron was excruciating.

As soon as this part of the programme had been performed, a bucket of liquid salt was dashed against his breast where the brands had been applied.

For a moment it seemed to him that he should yell outright, so intense was the smarting sensation resulting from this briny bath, but no sound came from him, much to the wonder of Diablo.

"Release him!" the chief cried, sharply. "A man of his grit deserves the honors of the Infernal Band. Now, then, Sir Photograph Phil, I will read the oath of allegiance, and you are to repeat it after me, word for word, with a revolver against your temple. The least hesitation will cause that revolver to go off, and as a result you will be a dead man."

"Very well, sir. Go ahead with your machine; I'm ready," Phil replied, grimly, for he knew that if he could stand the excruciating agony of the burning-irons, he certainly could bear to take the oath; for he was not taking it in the sight of God, but in the sight of the devil. Hence he argued there was no harm.

The chief began to read the oath, and word for word Photograph Phil repeated it after him.

Dear reader, we refrain from giving it upon paper.

"And now," Diablo said, closing the book, "dost thou understand what thou hast sworn to—what a terrible vow binds you to us, young man?"

"I should judge that my understanding must be in some degree aroused by this time!" Phil replied, grimly.

"And thou knowest that thou art bound to me, body and soul—bound to obey my every beck and nod—bound to execute your best work in my behalf when I shall so command it?"

"I ain't deaf, you old son of a gun!"

"Take care! provoke me not, lest I smite you," the chief replied. "Brothers, release and anoint the prisoner."

This was promptly done.

The bonds which confined the Boy Sleuth were cut, and he stood upon the floor, while ready hands dressed and anointed his burns and rubbed the blood in his limbs into circulation.

He was then helped on with his garments, and stood in the garb in which he had entered.

Diablo then descended from the throne.

"You must now draw for life!" he commanded, exhibiting the ends of a couple of straws in his hands. "Diuena, you have the first choice. If you draw the short straw twice out of three times, you are doomed to be shot until dead!"

The Spaniard nodded solemnly, and seized the end of one of the straws, while Photograph Phil took the remaining one.

Diuena drew the short straw. Again Diablo retired long enough to get the straws arranged, and again did the Spaniard draw the fatal straw.

"You must die!" the chief said, in a low, hoarse tone, and scarcely had the words left his lips, when the Spaniard dropped to the floor with a bullet through his brain, and Photograph Phil was a regular member of the order of the Dread Infernal Forty—was an outlaw among outlaws.

"Come!" Diablo said. "I would see you alone, for there is work for you to do."

He led the way, and Photograph Phil followed. He calculated that his initiation was at an end, and that possibly there might be a chance for escape.

Diablo led the way beyond the dais, and stopped

within a large circle which had been marked out on the floor, motioning Phil to imitate his example, which he did, and, to his surprise, they began to go rapidly downward into a pit of darkness like unto Stygia.

Down—down—Phil was not able to judge how far, ere the platform upon which they stood grounded upon a rocky bottom.

"Be careful, now!" cautioned the voice of Diablo.

"Here—take my hand, and follow me."

"Photograph Phil will look out for himself, never you fear!" was the reply; "so sail ahead."

They stepped from the platform into a little niche in the rock, and immediately the platform arose rapidly upward to the floor of the outer-world edifice which they had recently quitted.

"Come!" Diablo said, sharply. "Get down upon your hands and knees, and follow at my heels, until I bid you rise to your feet."

Phil obeyed, for there was nothing else to do. He found that the passage through which they were to creep was barely large enough to allow of their moving upon hands and knees, and, moreover, that the rocks were wet and slimy.

The blackness was intense.

From the mouth of the shaft the passage tended slightly upward, and, in many places, water dripped down upon them from crevices in the rock, wetting them to the skin.

As he crept along, the mind of Photograph Phil was not idle. Remembering the situation he had occupied when he had left the above-ground retreat, and the way he had stepped from the platform, he gradually figured it out that they were creeping in a northerly direction, and this decision, added to the dripping of the water, convinced him that they were either traveling in under the bed of the creek, or were beneath the falls which tumbled into the valley.

On—on they crept; it seemed to him that their journey would never reach an end. Diablo uttered not a syllable but moved straight on, and nothing was left for Phil to do but follow in his wake.

It seemed many hours ere they emerged from the narrow channel into a large niche in the rocks, the size of an ordinary room.

Here they were enabled to rise to their feet and stretch their cramped limbs. From the niche, or cave, a broader passage ran on—all of these strange excavations seemed to have been wormed out by water-power.

After taking a drink from a canteen Diablo led on. Pursuing the course of the passage, they soon emerged into a scene which was strange as it was startling.

There was a gigantic plateau of sand and rock of five or six acres' extent, walled up on every side by perpendicular walls of rugged pine-timbered rocks to the height of several hundred feet, leaving a sort of basin, as it were, locked out from the world.

Upon the eastern and western sides of the plateau were rows of small but neatly-arranged log huts or cabins, counting up to the number of forty—twenty upon a side.

And about, within this peculiar scene, were gathered two-score of men, clad in the miner's costume, and wearing upon their faces full black masks. They were engaged in panning out sand or swinging the pick, while, as in one voice, they sung hilariously.

It was a strange, wild scene upon which the moon, from far above, poured a halo of beautiful light.

Diablo stopped in the entrance to the plateau and gazed upon the picture with a smile.

"They are all mine!" he murmured, with evident satisfaction; "all mine, bound to me body and soul. They are my slaves who toil that I may realize gold from their labors. Dost see them, Philip? Every man has lost his tongue; they work, but cannot speak, but can sing."

"Behold the works of a man whose only aim is to serve the devil—whose only delight is in gold and revenge. Ha! the word arouses me to my work. Listen! I have brought you here to see this secret gold-mine—to show you the slaves who work for the Infernal Band of which I am chief. But one man, outside of our order, knows of this secret mine. That man is the Sport, Rosebud Bob. He must die, and I have ordained that you shall go into the outer world, as my agent, to kill this Sport. Then, and only then, will our order realize anything from this mine—then, only, shall we be free from fear of detection."

"And suppose I fail to kill the Sport?" Photograph Phil inquired.

He was estimating the chances of warfare against these brethren who would use him for a tool—these pards in blackest villainy.

"You shall be set at liberty, to enter into that business which may most please you. But you shall ever be watched as closely as though you were to remain here. A shadow shall ever be upon your track that will note your every action and report to me. Any attempt of yours to leave Cascade City will be thwarted by my band; any attempt at treachery on your part shall be rewarded with a horrible death. Remember! you cannot escape, and if your life is precious to you, you will preserve your faith by action in behalf of the order. One month will be given to you to kill the Sport, or whoever may learn of this secret mine. If the lifeless corpse of the Yankee is not left where I can assure myself of his death, within the month, I shall set my bloodhounds after you, and they shall hunt you down to death, no matter to what part of the earth you may flee!"

Phil bowed.

Indeed, he did not know what else to do under the circumstances. His first thought was to get out into the outer world, and leave his necessary plans until after that.

"There is one more point I wish to advise you on," Captain Diablo said, leading the way out into the plateau, further. "The so-called moon-tide which washes gold into the valley below is also a work of my organization. To the north-east of this retreat a small stream flows tranquilly along until it reaches a point just beyond us to the south, where it debouches from its subterranean course and pours in a cascade into the gulch. Once a month, three streams, which wash gold from the San Guise mines, are turned into Cascade creek, and a great quantity rushes with the tide, and is led off into this cavern by trap-slides. Much of it also goes over into the gulch, but so insignificant a sum as to be scarcely worth notice in comparison with the Saharas of golden sand which reach us. Several venturesome men have attempted to unravel the seeming mystery of the moon-tide, but they have been summarily captured and dispatched. We will now blindfold you, and return you to the gulch, in a way which you shall know not, for the ways of the Infernal Forty are many and mysterious."

At a signal from the chief, two of the masked miners approached. Phil was securely blindfolded and his hands bound behind his back.

He was then pushed forward, and the way led by Diablo. After much walking, climbing and descending, he came to the conclusion that they were so doing in order to puzzle him, and when his nostrils were saluted by the fragrance of mountain flowers, and he felt grass beneath his feet, he was aware that they had accomplished their object.

There was a quick cutting of the bonds which bound his hands—then, flying footsteps, and by the time he had torn the bandage from his eyes, the person who had accompanied him was gone.

In vain he glanced in every direction, hoping to catch a glimpse of the person; he had vanished, and the Boy Sleuth found himself standing alone in the valley, near where the stage-road wound down from among the eastern bluffs.

The moonlight streamed just as brightly as when he had left the gulch, nor was the throng of humanity beneath the white autumnal moon perceptibly diminished.

All along the gulch the crowds were gathered—the music of dance-house orchestras throbbed upon the clear air; sweetly came the perfume-laden breeze wafting up from the south, with almost intoxicating effect.

Outdoors "cheap Johns" were crying out their merchandise; the saloons were discharging freights of drunken miners; if you heard the crack of a pistol accompanied by a yell of agony, you would be considered pardonable if you gave no further attention to the matter than by remarking:

"Another pilgrim shuffled off."

For such is life in the mines.

If a miner or a citizen dies a natural death, it is apt to attract more attention than though he were to get "salted," or should commit suicide.

"I am an outlaw!" Photograph Phil murmured, as he stood gazing upon the scene, "and all because of that temple of 'Bacchus,' as it is called. I am a sworn and branded outlaw—the servant of an earthly Satan. Ha! ha! we shall see how far I will serve you, Sir Diablo! We shall see what can be done in your case! Certainly! your doings of to-night have given me a glimpse into a hell upon earth, and it would be queer if I fear to work. In the meantime, quiet shall serve me best. To-morrow, I will go ahead and start up my photographing business, and while I work at that, as Photograph Phil, the ever-watchful Boy Sleuth shall be upon his guard, and work even as the ferret works. As to this Rosebud Rob, I must make him my special study."

Tired and sore, he resolved to hunt up a lodging-place at some miner's cabin, or perchance bunk in his wagon.

CHAPTER V.

MURDER AND ROBBERY.

THE tables were turned fairly upon the reverend Virginian and his backers, for evident it was that these citizens of Cascade City, headed as they were by Rob, Bess, and the bunmer, were in no way disposed to see foul play.

The black-mustached companion of the reverend gentleman swore furiously as he saw that it would be death to attempt to take the maiden from the Sport, who stood half-supporting her on his strong arm.

"Curses upon you!" he growled. Then turning to the Reverend Lucas, he continued:

"Tis little use of arguing with these meddling fools, and we had better retire until we can invoke the aid of the law."

"Nay, my son: I fear we have arrived in a border of Hades where there is no law. Let me appeal to them once more."

And rising in his stirrups, he glanced into the sea of rugged, hairy faces which were turned upon him—some of them, however, with anything but encouraging expressions.

"My Christian friends," he began, in an affected tone of sorrow, "I wish once more to appeal to your honor—to your manhood, in this, my hour of trial. I simply ask a boon that is in your power to grant—the restoration of my poor, misguided ward, who, I may as well tell you, is at times slightly deranged. Oh! how much sadness she has caused—how much pain and worry! The more so, perhaps, because I know that she is young and illy fitted to take care of herself, even were her mind in a sound condition. Therefore, my dear friends, I implore you to restore her to my arms—rescue her from that young ruffian, who has, I see, cast an evil and admiring eye upon her. Oh, Lord! thou wilt not permit the unholy sacrifice!"

At these words, a hot flush rioted over Rosebud Rob's face, and he made a gentle effort to release himself from the fugitive ward of the Virginian. But with a low cry of alarm she clung closer to his arm, seeming to regard him as her protector.

"Don't give me up to him—please don't let him take me!" she cried, piteously.

"Never fear, for I do not intend to do anything of the kind!" the Sport replied, in a whisper. "Be calm, and I will arrange all for your personal safety."

"Oh! thank you, sir. How can I—"

"Don't mention it, please," he replied; then disengaging himself he stepped to the big miner, John Mason.

There were a few moments of whispered conversation, after which the Sport went back to his charge, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"Gentlemen!" he said, glancing about, "as this seems rather a peculiar case, and as this young lady has assured us that the reverend gentleman is a scheming hypocrite, unworthy of the care of a young and unprotected lady, I motion that for the present we put her under the guardianship of our esteemed fellow-citizen, John Mason, miner, who is willing to accept the charge, and is willing to vouch for the readiness of his sister, Miss Priscilla, to care for her. You all know Mason to be an honest, faithful citizen, and I feel sure that you will sanction my little arrangement!"

"Hip! yip! hooray!" yelled Baltimore Bess, excitedly, and there rose upon the air of the night a tremendous shout of approval, that showed how deeply the public believed in the Sport.

"That settles it!" Rosebud Rob said. "Mason, I turn the young lady over to your care. Miss Grey, I make you acquainted with your future protector, Mr. Mason, whom I am positive you will find in every way a gentleman."

"But, my enemies—they will make him give me up," the girl said, gazing with a shudder at the Reverend Lucas Alyne, who had ridden nearer, and was watching the proceedings, narrowly, in company with his swarthy-faced, villainous-looking son.

"Never fear about them, miss!" the big miner said. "You can bet they'll keep away from the cabin while I'm around—an' when I ain't, thar's my old-maid sister, Prissy—she'll dust 'em, now, I tell ye. Priscilla's a reg'lar tearer when she's a mind to be, you bet!"

"And as for you!" Rosebud Rob said, turning to the Alynes and their backers, "the sooner you 'dust,' the better it will be for your health!"

"Waal, neow, ef that ain't Scripter, ye kin count my vote out next election!" Baltimore Bess agreed. "Come! hoist yourselves, ye pie-faced coyotes. It's one, two, three—bounce; an' ef ye don't bounce, I'll assist ter bounce ye, you hear me!"

Evidently the party came to the conclusion that "bounce" was their only alternative, for wheeling their horses, they galloped away through the town, without a backward glance.

Then, Rosebud Rob offered Jennie his arm, and motioned for Mason to lead the way, which he did, the crowd parting to let them through.

As Mason lived some distance down the gulch, the Sport had opportunity for quite a chat with his new charge, and he was agreeably surprised to find that, although she was young in years, she was old in wisdom.

Her conversation betrayed no lack of education or refinement; her movements were graceful—her nature that of the impulsive, warm-hearted maidens of the South.

"I owe you a great deal," she said, as she put her fair, soft hand in that of the Sport, just as Mason's cabin loomed up before them, "and, being penniless, I am afraid it will be a long time before I can repay you for your kindness."

"The longer the better," Rosebud Bob replied, coolly, as he pressed her hand warmly, "for I should hope to be shot if I ever was tempted to take pay for a service done a lady. Please do not mention it again."

"If it annoys you, I will not. Will you call upon me, Mr.—"

"Mapleton is my name, although I generally hail to the name of Rosebud Bob, or the Sport."

"But you haven't answered my other question," the little beauty reminded.

"Oh! as to that—yes, if you like. Perhaps I shall be needed to drive away these enemies of yours."

And, with a quiet laugh, he shook hands for the last time, and, bidding her good-evening, sauntered back into the heart of the town—for the cabin of John Mason stood partly back against the bluffs, somewhat isolated from other habitations.

The night being warm the door was wide open, and a bright light streamed therefrom, cheerily.

"It ain't much of a palace, miss," Mason said, humbly, "but it's a purty snug little home after all, an' I reckon a pilgrim orter be satisfied wi' what he can afford, in this world."

"You speak very truthfully, sir," Jennie replied; "and I am sure I shall like my new home. Only, I feel ashamed that I have no money with which to compensate you for your trouble."

"Tut! tut! don't speak of it, little lady. Your bright an' cheery presence will more'n pay for what little you eat an' sleep. Come right along inside, and let's find Priscilla."

Priscilla Mason was easily found. She was seated before a table, paring potatoes, preparatory for the morning, and humming an ancient Sabbath-school song, which she must have committed to memory years before, when she was a blooming young maiden. For Priscilla could now be safely called an old maid, when five-and-forty years had dragged over her head, and left furrows and wrinkles in her pinched and bony countenance. Indeed, Priscilla

possessed no beauty at all, and years of single life had served to sour her temper as well as her looks.

"Well, John Miner! is that you?" she exclaimed, in a shrill, harsh voice. "I don't see what keeps you out-of-doors so late every night, I hope for goodness sake you will try and mend your ways, John. You know what the Good Book says about the evils of staying out late of nights. Oh, deary! it makes me sick to be always a-jawin' of you, John Miner."

"Then, for Heaven's sake! don't everlastingly make a habit of it, Prissy. But look here, if you can possibly take your hand off from that potato-pan, and see what a present I have got for you!"

Miss Priscilla did look—then bounded to her feet with a feminine shriek, and away went the potatoes and pan upon the floor.

"You, John Miner!" she gasped; "you—you gone and tied a woman to your coat-tails!"

"Hold on now, Prissy; don't get off her belt, all ter once. This young lady has been placed in our protection by the miners, and we are to keep away a passel o' galoots who hev laid claims ter her. That's all—so quiet yourself."

"Dew tell!" Miss Priscilla gasped, hastily picking up her potatoes, and sprucing about, wonderfully. "So ye're a regular leetle herline, eh, miss, like they tell us about in the novels? Laws! who'd 'a' thought? John Miner, do you go to the grocery and get some tea at once, for the canister is clean gone empty, and there's nothing so strengthening to the nerves as a good cup of tea. Herline drink tea, don't they, miss?" she added, turning apologetically to Jennie. "Dear me! I clear forget all I ever did know."

"I presume they do," Jennie laughed, "though you are overrating me in calling me a heroine. That is one of the things I never laid claim to."

Miss Priscilla would not hear to such an idea, however, and continually persisted in making Jennie out a real heroine, such, she would add, "as you read about in the story papers."

A plain but substantial meal of venison, oatmeal, and corn-bread, with a choice of fresh milk or tea, was soon set upon the table, and thankfully the new ward of John Mason proceeded to do justice to it, for she was very hungry, having had nothing to eat since the day previous, when, as she related, she had paid out her last penny at a miner's cabin for a piece of bread.

The meal finished, she was shown to a snug little room, which Miss Priscilla assured her was to be her own; and after bidding the hostess good-night, the fugitive undressed and retired for the night, feeling a greater sense of safety than she had for many a long week. And if in her dreams the handsome face and form of the Spotter Sport did not rise before her, it was something else of a pleasing nature, for occasionally a happy expression flitted across the fair face as it lay silent in slumber.

Rosebud Rob, after leaving Jennie Grey in front of Mason's cabin, sauntered back into the town, thinking, very naturally, of the pretty waif who had been so suddenly thrust upon his hands.

As he was passing the Big Lode Bank, the only stone structure, by the way, in the town, Mr. Mark Manners, the gentlemanly cashier and book-keeper, came out, locking and closing the door after him.

The Sport nodded pleasantly, and was passing on, when Manners called him back, with a troubled expression upon his face.

"What is it?" Rosebud asked, returning, in some surprise, for he had never known Manners intimately.

"Oh! I was a little worried, and wished to consult you," the clerk said, seating himself, and producing a case of cigars. "You are well posted as to the evil element in this place, and perhaps can advise me what to do."

"Maybe I can, if you open up your batteries, so that I can see what you are driving at."

"Well, in the first place, we are kind of worried, because we have an overstock of gold on hand, which we have no immediate chance to ship, as the 'Ironclad' will not get around here in a month again. Had I not, from your several acts, learned to trust you implicitly, I should not tell you this. Perhaps you will be surprised when I tell you that there is a half a million of dollars in gold inside these walls, in addition to the cash assets of the bank itself."

Evidently the Sport was surprised, for he gave vent to a quiet whistle.

"All that gold never was taken out of the sands of Cascade Gulch," he said, interrogatively.

"Oh! no. There are two large deposits in the names of men who have recently come from other mines, besides a considerable dust and grains from this valley."

"And you feel rather spookish wi' sech a grist in the tiller, eh?"

"Yes, especially as men have been caught in the act of watching the bank upon several occasions of late, after dark."

"Were they masked?"

"Yes, and well heeled," was the reply.

"Diablo, the road agent's men, no doubt. You've heard of them?"

"No."

"Well, you're lucky then. A new gang of cut-throats, you see, under a human devil called Diablo."

"Trying to emulate the remarkable career of the illustrious Deadwood Dick, eh?"

"By no means. Deadwood Dick had many gentlemanly traits, but from what I can learn, this so-called Diablo and his gang are human vultures and cut-throats, whose only aim is plunder and bloodshed. I've pricked up my ears, of late, and shall

give the case of these gents some of my individual attention."

"And in the meantime, do you believe our bank is in any danger?"

"Not if you keep it guarded. How many persons know that you have so much wealth on hand?"

"None excepting yourself, Millicent Vere, and the officers of the bank."

"Ah! who is this Millicent Vere, of whom you speak?"

"Oh! she is all right—the daughter of a widow, down below here. I have known her some time, and believe her perfectly honest, or I shouldn't have intrusted her with so important a secret."

"Well, maybe you did right, and maybe you didn't!" the Sport observed, thoughtfully. "I wouldn't intrust such a secret with a woman, unless she were my wife, and then I should want a muzzle on her tongue."

And so saying, he sauntered away down the gulch, leaving Mark Manners sitting upon the bank steps.

From that night, dated Cascade City's history in the annals of crime.

For in the early dawn of the morning the startling intelligence was heralded abroad, that a robbery had been perpetrated at the Big Lode Bank, and the watchman, Ike Caruthers, and the cashier, Mark Manners, had been killed.

The news spread like wildfire, and vast crowds quickly gathered in the vicinity of the bank.

Rosebud Rob had been among the first upon the spot, after the alarm was given, and he was speedily joined by half a dozen others, among whom were Baltimore Bess, Bully Ike, the bummer, and Photograph Phil.

The dastardly work had been committed within the bank, for Manners and the man Caruthers lay upon the counting-room floor, a bullet-hole in each of their temples telling how they had died.

The place, even to the single vault, had been ransacked of everything of money value, and such articles as were not portable had been smashed, or damaged to a great extent.

And over the kalsomined walls were written, with the devices of skull and cross-bones, the words:

"This is the work of Diablo and his Infernal Party!"

"That explains it," Rosebud Rob said, pointing to the inscription. "It is the work of that human ghoul, Diablo. In the dead of night they have somehow contrived to surprise Manners and the guard, and murdered them in cold blood."

As he finished speaking, Baltimore Bess approached, and as she caught sight of the deathly face of Manners lying upon the floor, she suddenly grew very white—gave vent to a strange, painful cry, and in a dead faint would have fallen, had it not been for Rosebud Rob, who caught her and broke her fall.

"What was Manners to her?" the president of the bank asked, coming forward with a pitcher of water, which he dashed into her face.

"You're given me a conundrum!" the Sport replied, gazing down into the pretty face of the daredevil, and comparing it to the vision which was in his mind, of the waif, Jennie Grey. There were lines in the face of Baltimore Bess, which hid great sorrows—there were lines there sweet and beautiful, which reminded the Sport of the maiden whom he had made John Mason's ward.

Bess soon regained her consciousness.

Hers was a strong constitution, and she ever rallied quickly.

Rosebud Rob assisted her to arise, and wiped the wet from her face with his handkerchief. She trembled in every limb, and was very white—shuddered, as with horror, when her eyes for an instant wandered back to the dead face of Mark Manners.

"Come!" Rosebud said, in a low tone, "you had better leave this place. Let me assist you."

"No, Mr. Mapleton, thanking you all the same. I am stronger now, and can go myself and alone. I stop with Mrs. Lyoniel, up the gulch, and can easily go there."

The Sport knew that Mrs. Lyoniel was a good, Christian lady, who had several months ago lost her husband in a blasting horror, up at Crook City, and had come into Cascade City, with a view to taking a few boarders.

"You had best go at once, then," he said, in his kindly but authoritative way. "If you need my assistance in any way, send for me. But, first, what is Mark Manners to you? Are there any directions you would leave in regard to the disposal of his body?"

"None!" she replied, a set look coming upon her pretty face—so quietly beautiful it looked now, in its unwonted pallor. "It was only a moment of womanish weakness which caused me the faint. The dead man is nothing to me."

She turned and left the bank.

There was a surging crowd gathered on the outside, but they parted, respectfully, for her to pass through, for all in the gulch city knew that she would brook no indignity nor familiarity.

In the meantime, the bodies of the murdered men were taken to their respective homes, where they were prepared for burial.

Manners was an old bachelor, as nearly as could be learned, and boarded at one of the shanty hotels, but lodging within the bank.

Caruthers had a wife and several small children, and lived in a little cabin further down the gulch.

The affair of the murder and robbery created such an excitement as Cascade City had never known before.

Men stood in knots engaged in conversation, all about the gulch, and there were many bitter curses uttered against Diablo and his gang.

Rosebud Rob, ever on hand and accommodating,

superintended the arrangement of the bodies for burial, and such things as were needed, he purchased with his own means. It was his way of doing a kindness.

After everything was prepared he went back to the bank, and had a short conversation with the directors.

They were men-about-town who had accumulated some wealth and put it into the banking-business.

Their respective fortunes were now broke, as well as those of the depositors, until the money could be recovered.

There was a meeting between the depositors and officers, and all agreed, by unanimous vote, that the Sport was the man to put upon the trail.

After some thought, together with an offer of one-third the booty recaptured, Rosebud Rob signified his willingness to hunt up the perpetrators of the robbery and murder, provided sufficient time was given him for his purpose.

He then left the bank, and turned his footsteps to ward the cabin of the miner, John Mason.

He had become acquainted with the Masons, and he felt comparatively at home in visiting them.

And if it was a pleasure to visit them heretofore, why should it not be now, when the cabin was enlivened by a ray of sunshine in the bewitching, artless person of Jennie Grey.

The waif had made a deep impression upon the Sport.

CHAPTER VI. JENNIE GREY'S STORY.

As he approached the cabin he perceived Jennie sitting in the doorway, engaged in paring some wild apples, which had grown upon a tree high at hand. She was attired in a wrapper, which had evidently some day belonged to Miss Priscilla, and wore one of the latter's aprons—altogether making a charming picture of a rosy, happy little housewife; for she was singing cheerily, and the wild look in her eyes of the previous night had been replaced by an expression which was sweet to behold.

She arose with a welcoming smile, and put forth her fair little hands trustingly into the Sport's rougher ones, as he came up to where she was standing.

"Oh! I am so glad to see you, sir. One never forgets a friend, I believe, in an hour of need," and she laughed, showing her pearly teeth to the best possible advantage.

"Thank you for the compliment," Rob replied, leaning against the doorpost, and gazing down upon her as she resumed her seat. "One would suppose you quite happy and contented; you sing as happily as the thrush. But then, perhaps it is your nature to be merry under circumstances where others would be sorrowful."

"Please do not misjudge me, sir. I always try to be cheerful, but sometimes fail utterly. I am sure I feel very contented here. Indeed, why should I? Mr. and Miss Mason are both very kind and generous to me; and while my gratitude to them is earnest, my gratitude to you knows no bounds. For, but for you, my enemies would even now have me in their possession."

"I trust not. I am sure there are plenty of men in this town who would stand up for a defenseless woman."

"But how many are there, Mr. Mapleton, who would take a woman's word in the face of the plausible lies of the meek-faced hypocrite who passes himself off, and would hide his blackness, under the clerical garb? Ah, sir! but few. In fleeing all the way hither from Virginia I have had ample experience, which has taught me that a wolf may hide in sheep's clothing, and be a wolf withal."

"Very truly spoken. We little know when our best friends may, literally, display a cloven foot. Have you seen anything of your enemies, Miss Grey?"

"No, sir; but their silence, I believe, means evil to me. Oh, Mr. Mapleton! if you could but know how I dread that man, Lucas Alyne, and his unscrupulous son, Jean! A chill of horror creeps over my flesh every time I think of them."

"You should not entertain such feelings, but should be brave. Although these men may be villains, fear them not, for you have true friends who will be eager enough to fight your battles. We'd you object to telling me more about them and yourself?"

"Certainly not, sir, for I feel that in you I can put implicit trust. Although I know comparatively nothing of you, you must not feel flattered when I tell you that I believe you a true and noble gentleman under your guise of the Sport."

"Thank you for your good opinion, Miss Jennie. May I be lent the power to do more to favor it. Now, if you will tell me about yourself—"

"Certainly. Pray be seated;" and she made room for him in the wide doorway; nor was he loth to accept a position near this fair girl, in whom he was becoming more and more interested. She was modest and refined—somehow so different from the women generally encountered in the mines, and hers was the warm impulsive nature of the bonny maidens of the South and the tropics—of those women who love intensely and hate even stronger.

And she, with her artless ways, was the one out of a hundred who could particularly interest the cool, calculating Sport.

"To begin with," she said, her starry eyes gazing away into space, "some five years ago, after the sudden death of my mother, my father found his pecuniary circumstances greatly embarrassed, and determined to seek his fortune anew in the Western territories, where gold was to be found for the digging. Our grand old estate, called Lionsfold, was threatened by the auctioneer's hammer, unless

money could be raised to pay off certain debts, and in a blind moment my father turned to this Lucas Alyne, who was the minister of our parish, and requested a loan of money, as the minister was said to have more money than he could conveniently use.

"Alyne at once consented to loan enough money to papa to square up all his debts, provided a mortgage was given him upon Lionsfold, to be foreclosed in seven years, if the money was not returned with six per cent. interest."

"How much money did your father borrow of this money-lending minister, Miss Grey?"

"Ten thousand dollars, sir; and it took every cent to pay up the long-standing debts, with the exception of barely enough to bring my father into the West, where he hoped in a few years to earn enough to redeem the mortgage held by Lucas Alyne against Lionsfold. Alas! how one's hopes may be blasted!"

"In the meantime, we were to be left under the guardianship of the pastor, Lucas Alyne—in saying *we*, I refer to my elder sister Pauline, and myself. Poor papa had every confidence in Mr. Alyne—indeed, the whole parish believed him to be a moral and self-sacrificing Christian man, and therefore we were left under his guardianship, until papa should return, or until we should become of age. Having arranged all to his satisfaction, and believing that his children were in the best of care, poor papa set out for the West.

"And we have never heard from him since. Whether he is alive and still laboring in those Western mines, or whether he has been killed, is a problem we have never been able to solve.

"The first two years of our stay at Lionsfold, while Lucas Alyne had removed his family, were endurable because Paulie and I were much in school, and, too, Mrs. Alyne was alive. She was a kind, good lady, and although we obtained an insight into her husband's nature, and that of her son, she did all in her power to screen their sinister acts from our observation. Nevertheless, we both grew to regard the father and son with aversion, that deepened into positive hatred on the part of my sister—although I cannot say that I ever really hated anybody, no matter how deep my dislike may have been.

"At the end of the second year after my father's departure—which, by the way, was three years ago this month—Mrs. Alyne died, and we, two young, inexperienced girls, were left alone to battle with the two wolves in sheep's clothing. For, though a preceptress or governess was provided to look after us, she was literally our enemy, being in all the schemes of the minister and his son, and we received nearly as many insults as though she were not in the house.

"Paulie was at this juncture eighteen years of age, while I was but sixteen; but we were both plucky, to some extent, and fought our enemies like young rebels. But soon there came a change. Paulie fell in love with a handsome young lawyer, and I believed that he returned her pure affection, until he absconded with a large amount of funds which had been intrusted to his keeping, and left her a cold, cruel letter, stating that he had but been trifling with her—that he had not the least spark of affection for her—bidding her seek another lover who would be more befitting to her station in life. Poor Paulie! It nearly broke her heart, for awhile, she loved him so; then she grew changed—was no longer herself, but a wild, reckless, harum-scarum girl. Nor was I greatly surprised at the news that came to me one morning.

"It came in the shape of a note from Paulie, stating that she still loved her deserting lover, Dick Turner, and, in search of him, had gone out into the world. Strange to say, Mr. Mapleton, I did not worry about her welfare. I knew that she was capable of caring for herself, for she possessed an indomitable will, and could be as firm as a rock. It is such women who can resist temptation, and fight their own battles.

"The Alynes made every effort to recapture her, but all to no avail, and they therefore turned upon me. I shall not try to enumerate to you the miseries I have endured in the time which has elapsed since, up to four months ago, when I gathered together sufficient courage and a little money, to flee from a life that was one routine of slavery, insult, and torture. Thank God that I am at last temporarily out of the power of my enemies!"

"The mortgage has not been foreclosed upon Lionsfold, yet, then?"

"No; nor can it be for several years yet. The property, being in close proximity to a growing city, has, in the interval, greatly advanced in value, and consequently, the Alynes are desirous of retaining possession of it, as it is indeed a princely heritage. In order to do this, the reverend reprobate proposes to marry me to himself, and thus secure it. For neither the father nor the son will listen to anything else than that poor papa is dead."

"They may slip up on their calculation," Rosebud Rob said, rising. "I thank you, Miss Jennie, for what you have told me, for it may perhaps enable me to serve you further in your trials. I must bid you good-morning now, hoping you may find your new home abundant with comforts which breed contentment."

"But, you must come and see me once in awhile," she said, offering her fair, shapely hand. "Am I not excusable if I long for younger companionship than that of dear, good Aunt Priscilla and Mr. Mason?" and a sweet, expressive look took possession of her eyes as she gazed into the deep, fathomless eyes of the Sport.

"Surely you are to be pardoned, and if my occasional presence will in any way please you, very likely I shall be on hand when wanted. Now, however, I must bid you adieu!"

And, raising the pretty hand gallantly to his lips, he saluted, and then strode away, just as the daredevil, Baltimore Bess, crossed the gulch at right-angles, not far away.

That her sharp gaze had seen the parting, the Sport felt sure, and a peculiar flush dyed his cheek, as he approached the spot where she had halted, evidently waiting for him to come up.

"So! so!" she exclaimed, in an attempted merry tone, which Rosebud Rob could see was feigned. "The Romeo has found his Juliet, eh, in the wail of a romantic adventure?"

"Why so, Bess? Cannot a fellow be gallant without his motives being misjudged, eh, old gal?" was his reply.

"Oh! it's all right," she replied, with a light laugh. "It's none of my business, of course."

"And why not, Bess? Of late we've been sort of pards, and got along first-rate, for our interests seemed mutual."

"You jest bet on it, they were, Sport! But that was before you tackled on to a new lode—that is to say, before you took a new responsibility upon your hands."

"What do you mean, Bess? What jealous freak is this, on your part?"

"Oh, nothing! nothing!" she said, hastily, turning her face partly away that he might not see the moisture in her eyes. "I hear that you are going to undertake the capture of this man, Diablo?"

"Yes, and shall want you to help me," he said. "But I want you like yourself, Bess—I want the fearless dare-devil, instead of the woman you are now. No more of this jealousy then, if you are a pard of mine. Remember, in this hunt for Diablo there is money to be won—or death!"

Her eyes glistened. She seemed firmer and more fitting to the strange character she sustained.

"When you want me—whistle!" she said; "I will be ready."

"Bess, why do you not call upon the girl, at the cabin yonder? You are nearer her age than any other woman in the mines. She is a sweet little thing."

"I haven't the least doubt of it," she replied, a spice of sarcasm in her tone—"leastwise, the fragrant rosebud and the honey-bee are sometimes associated together. Perhaps I shall visit the young lady soon."

And with a smile, she walked away in a different direction than that taken by the Sport, as he wended his steps toward his hotel.

All that day, the excitement was unprecedented in Cascade City.

Men lay idle in order to participate in a general gossip about the tragedy, and about the bloody-handed desperado, Diablo.

A vindictive feeling was afloat, and a few of the bolder ones organized into a secret vigilance band, to be ready at the shortest notice. And reward-papers, offering five hundred dollars for the capture of the gang, were posted up in the gulch and on the trails.

During the day Rosebud Rob sauntered about, here and there, keeping his eye "peeled," to use a figurative expression, and hearing as much as possible without saying anything. It occurred to him that the dead cashier had made mention of Millicent Vere as being in the secret of the large amount of bullion in the bank. By careful inquiry he managed to ascertain the dwelling occupied by the Veres. It was a sort of hut of logs which had been hastily thrown together—could scarcely be called a cabin, and was not inviting as a habitation.

He lingered about in the neighborhood until some person issued therefrom, which proved to be a young woman.

As near as he could learn, she was comely of face and form, but poorly dressed. More the Spotter Sport could not ascertain, as he did not care to be unduly hasty in making her acquaintance.

During his rambles he stumbled accidentally upon Jean, the younger of the Alynes. He was, in company with a crowd of others, engaged in looking over a stock of photographs which Photograph Phil had spread upon a hastily-constructed counter, in under an awning or tent which he had erected as his place of business. "Conservatory of Fine Arts," read the sign painted upon the canvas.

The eyes of the younger Alyne and the cool ones of the Sport met in a steady gaze almost simultaneously, and uttering a curse, the Easterner drew a long knife from his belt and sprung forward.

"Curse you!" he gasped, hoarse with sudden rage, which flamed all over his dark, swarthy countenance. "tell me where the girl is, or I'll knife you!"

Rosebud Rob smiled in his peculiar way. Then, making a sudden dart forward, knocked up the weapon of the young ruffian, and with the other hand struck him a blow between the eyes which dropped him.

A commendable nod of approval came from the young photographer, whose acquaintance Rosebud had formally made during the fore part of the day. "Good!" he said, as the Sport approached. "You have saved me the trouble of serving the chap in the same manner. He was growing very troublesome."

"And deserved worse than he got," the other replied. "Gentlemen, will some of you who are charitably disposed be kind enough to drag him, heels first, to the entrance of his hotel, wherever that may be?"

No one seemed to be thus "charitably disposed," however.

The bullying son of the Reverend Lucas Alyne had not made many friends since his debut in the "social" circles of Cascade City.

"How are you making it?" Rosebud Rob asked, glancing over some of the pictures, which had been

well executed. "Do you find it as profitable as digging gold?"

"I think so, yes, inasmuch as I had not a red left in my pocket this morning, while now I have something over ten dollars, as the result of my labors. It is a novelty, you see, in these out of the way places, and a good many stray bits come into my coffers, through such individuals as have a curiosity to know how they look upon a piece of tin-type. Have your picture taken?"

"No, thanks! I have no desire to add my negative to your already large rogues' gallery."

"Ha! ha! Call around again!"

Promising to do so, the Sport went to the shanty hotel where he boarded, and took his supper, after which he set out once more upon the gulch street.

As the evening progressed, he dropped into one of the many saloons devoted to drinking, gambling and concerts.

Not that the Sport had any desire or intention to gamble or drink, but he always found some new phase of character to study out.

It happened that he was the person necessary to produce a first-class row, as usual.

The Easterner, Jean Alyne, and his two companions, Peanut Joe and Stumpy Sam, were ranged along the bar, among others, pouring down the vile decoctions served up under the name of whisky.

The roughts took no notice of the Sport, although it was evident that they were aware of his presence.

An ugly discolored of the right eye probably accounted for Alyne's non-desire to sample the commodity in the shape of Rosebud Rob's fists.

The saloon was filled with the principal ruffians of the town, and although the Sport knew that there were none who were particularly in love with him, he did not hesitate to remain, when he had a pair of trusty revolvers in his belt.

The entrance of the irrepressible Bully Ike, seemed to be the starting-pin for a row.

For his coming was with the usual blustering swagger, and flow of gab.

"Hayr I am, feller-citizens—Bully Ike, the bruiser, right from ther 663rd Congressional destrict, you bet! Lookee out, now—a reg'lar old tarantula am I; a second cuzzin ter an 'arthquake, an' unkle ter a hurricane, an' a nephew ter an electric thunderbolt. An' the fac' thet I'm jest in trim, ter-night, wi' an ekal ballast on both sides, prompts me ter make ther gratuitous an' liberal wager thet I can put er wreath o' crape o'er ther eye o' any galoot in ther room, for ther drinks!"

Few who knew the irrepressible bummer, would have thought of taking sides against him, for he was an expert in fistcular amusements albeit his appearance was against him.

But the two low-browed, sinister-faced companions of Jean Alyne, were unaware of the bummer's prowess, and accordingly stepped forward.

Two more ruffianly-looking fellows probably never before came from the East.

What nature had not done for them to make them hideous of feature, whisky and dissipation had, and they were fitting representatives of the dark side of life in the low thoroughfares and precincts of many of our Eastern cities.

"Say, look heer," Peanut Joe, grunted, "did ye say ye ked lick me fer ther drinks?"

"I reckon them's w'at I sed, an' I don't neverer chaw ther retrospective."

"Oh! ye don't, eh! Mebbe ye don't know what fer style o' hair-pins we are—me an' my pard, yonder. We're Bowery roughts, we ar'—Bowery roughts, right from ther city of New York, you heer me?"

"An' you heer me! Hayr's old Bully Ike right from ther 663rd Congressional destrict, as kin lick ary galoot thet ever emigrated from severall New York cities!"

And to prove his assertion the apparently-stiffened old bummer was all lithe and active in an instant, and springing upon the New York ruffian, dealt him a terrible blow upon the end of his proboscis which caused the unlucky braggart to go sprawling upon the floor.

And when Stumpy Sam and Jean Alyne sprung forward, they followed in the wake of Peanut Joe; whereupon there was an ominous drawing of revolvers!

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOUNDED SPORT—BESS SOFTENS.

EVIDENT it was that the life of the bummer was in danger, as there were savage looks among the roughts who thronged the saloon, and they grew more threatening as Jean Alyne rose to his feet, with a frightful oath.

"Kill the son of a sea-cook—knife him—fill his carcass full of lead!" he roared, staggering blindly about. "I'll give a hundred dollars to the one who'll fetch me the old cuss's scalp!"

A dozen sprung forward toward the bummer! Knives and pistols were held significantly in hand.

But there was something which caused them to pause—a single shot, which brought one of the ruffians writhing to the floor, and then Rosebud Rob stepped readily to the bummer's side, a pair of handsomely-mounted six-shooters in hand.

At the same instant the door opened, and Baltimore Bess and John Mason stepped inside. Comprehending the situation at a glance, they unhesitatingly joined sides with the Sport and the bummer, just as the former cried out:

"Come on, you black-hearted cut-throats if you want to fight it out on this line! You'll find you don't quite run this town yet awhile, if I know myself!"

This was what was wanted. The ruffians, after imbibing large quantities of poor whisky, were stimulated up to the fighting

point, and did not need more than ordinary coaxing to engage in a pitched battle.

With wild howls they now sprung forward, firing as they came.

The shots detonated thick and fast; yells of human agony were heard; missiles were hurled promiscuously through the air, and there was the accompanying crashing of bottles and cheap mirrors.

Bully Ike went down from a club-blow upon the forehead in the first of the battle. But Rosebud Rob, Bess, and John Mason fought like tigers caged in their lairs; but Rosebud Rob soon staggered and fell.

Baltimore Bess saw him, and a gasp of horror escaped her lips—a strange whiteness crept over her face.

"Fight them off until I can get him out, Mason!" she whispered, in the miner's ear. "I fear that the devils have done for the Sport!"

The words seeming to inspire the miner with renewed strength and courage. He seized the stout post of a shattered chair, swung it aloft, and sprung forward in the face of half-a-dozen men as brawny as himself.

Swish! the ponderous weapon hissed through the air, and dropped the foremost tough like a log, while in alarm the remaining five retreated, step by step, until they were forced back into the gambling-room.

Here, Mason quickly slammed shut and barred the door, thus temporarily imprisoning his foes.

He then turned in time to see Baltimore Bess leaving the room, carrying the inanimate form of the Sport in her arms as if it had been a light rifle she were carrying.

Dragging the senseless bummer out into the gulch, John Mason set off toward his own home, for he was severely wounded in several places, and was growing weak from loss of blood.

Baltimore Bess, in the meantime, carried the Sport from the saloon, and to the house of the lady with whom she boarded. Not one woman of a thousand could have accomplished the feat, but she did, with seeming ease.

The widow stood in the door as the dare-devil approached with her burden.

"Why, Bess, what is the matter?" she exclaimed, in horror and amazement. "Who have you there? Mercy, how could you ever lift such a heavy man?"

"Pooh!" Bess gasped, "let me in. This is the Sport, of whom I've often told you. He's often been my partner in a row, and now that he's got plugged, I'm goin' to take care of him."

Mrs. Lyonel readily acquiesced. She was an earnest friend to Bess, and was eager to please her.

Bess bore the Sport up-stairs to her own room, as every other apartment in the widow's shanty was occupied by boarders.

Among them was a young physician, and while Bess and the widow retired, he was left to make an examination of the Sport's injuries.

A half-hour of anxious suspense it was to the girl before the physician came down to the parlor, where she was seated, attired, not now in her male suit, but in a neatly-fitting dress more suiting to her sex.

Her hair was combed back from her forehead, and relieved by a pretty bow of ribbon.

Scarcely the same person did she look; in her own attire the dare-devil was lost.

There was an eager, anxious look in her eyes, though, as the doctor entered, and she half arose from her seat, the words of inquiry trembling upon her lips:

"Mr. Mapleton—is he badly hurt?"

"Not dangerously, I guess," was the reply. "The bullet tore a passage not far from his heart, but I have extracted it safely, and all that is required now is for him to lay in bed a day or so, for his is the flesh that quickly mends. How was it that you escaped unhurt, Miss Bessie?"

"You have asked me more than I can tell you, Mr. Rosefeld. The bullets buzzed around me like angry hornets, but none of them stung me, except one, which kissed my arm. But as it did not draw the blood, it is of no account. Could I see Mr. Mapleton?"

"Certainly. There could be no harm in it, unless he were to get excited, which might not aid his recovery."

Baltimore Bess hastened up stairs and into the room of the sick man.

The Sport was bolstered up in bed, and although there was a pale streak about his lips, he appeared his own cheerful self. He started as Bess came in.

He had never seen her in feminine attire before, nor known how wondrously pretty she could be as a woman.

There was a dazzling expression in her eyes now, and a tempting flush to her cheek that he had never marked before. She glided forward to the bedside, her odd peculiar smile coming to her relief—the smile she had only for those who possessed her friendship.

"I am so glad you are not dangerously hurt," she said, taking his hand between her own. "Do you know I never fought so desperately before as I did to-night? I was just in the right mood for a pitched battle with somebody," and she gave vent to her old reckless laugh.

"Bess, you are a strange girl—or rather a woman," Rosebud Rob said, gazing thoughtfully into her face. "Why did you bring me here—why not have taken me to my hotel, or to?"

"Mason's!" she interrupted—"no, never there! I wanted you here, where I could see that you were cared for. Is not that enough for you to know at present?"

"Well, yes, I suppose it will have to do," he replied, with a faint smile. "I shall try, however, to get well very soon. The work of that Diablo must be attended to as soon as possible."

"Then you would not even thank me for bringing

you here?" she said, looking away to hide the tears that sprang to her eyes.

"Most assuredly I thank you," he replied; "I should be a brute if I didn't. And I am also glad you brought me here, if it will in any way add to your happiness. There, brush away those jealous tears, Bess; you are getting out of your old sorts. I shall be wishing directly, that Miss Grey was anywhere else than in Cascade City."

"I wish it already, Mr. Mapleton," was the reply, in a choked voice. "Please don't think me a fool, or vindictive, but I cannot think of that girl without a pang of—"

"Jealousy," he said, finishing for her. "Own the truth, Bess—is that not it?"

"Yes, if you wish. I am weak for telling you so, but I cannot help it," was the reply.

She still kept her face averted, but he could judge by the tremor which passed over her form that she was greatly agitated.

"Bess," he said, reaching and taking her hand and raising it to his lips, even though the effort cost him pain, "you are very good and kind, and I think I can comprehend something of your feelings, for woman has been one of the studies of my life. Leave me now, and return when you are calmer, and, above all, entertain no thoughts of jealousy against that pure-minded, innocent girl in the care of John Mason."

She arose from the chair by the bedside, and turned her gaze upon him—a look that startled him, it was so pregnant of thankful gratification. And then, before he could check her, she had bent and kissed him softly upon the forehead—turned and glided from the room.

While the Sport lay upon his bed, a puzzled expression came upon his face—a knitting together of the brows that denoted perplexity. His spirit chafed in this confinement. He longed to be out and abroad.

It was the only time in his eventful life that he remembered of being unable to go or come at will, unrestrained by sickness.

He was also aware that he was needed by the town, for they were all looking upon him to recover the stolen bullion, and bring the desperado, Diablo, to justice.

But there was no use of wrestling with impossibilities, and knowing this, he summarily dismissed all thoughts from his mind, as he had acquired the habit of doing, and sought rest in slumber.

How long he had slept he knew not, but he was awakened by an almost imperceptible touch upon the arm.

Opening his eyes, he saw a man's figure standing beside the bed—a figure wrapped in a long black cloak, with a mask upon the face.

He was startled at first, for it was something to him, unexpected. But when he saw that the gentleman of the night carried no weapons, visible, his curiosity became greater.

"Well?" he finally interrogated, "what will you have and have it sweetened? Seems to me you've been taking a mighty sight of liberty in entering my bed-chamber."

"Sh!" the other whispered, raising a finger, warningly. "Not so loud, or you will disturb the house, and I am sure you wouldn't wish to get a friend into trouble."

"A friend?"

"Yes—a friend, in disguise. I shall have to communicate to you my intelligence, in a low tone, as no doubt ears are eagerly listening to hear what I tell you. Several times I have been upon the point of telling you, but my motives have been interpreted by unseen enemies, and I have been warned by a hiss, to desist. Therefore, my coming here to-night is secret."

"Well, I am prepared to hear what you have to say," the Sport replied, although he was at loss to comprehend the nature of the revelation.

"I have not much to say, and therefore can say it in a very few words," the masked visitor said. "I have come to warn you that the desperado, Diablo, is seeking your life. He evidently hates you, and will endeavor to settle accounts with you, while you are lying here in bed. Therefore, let me advise you to keep your revolvers handy, and do most of your sleeping in the daytime."

"Who are you?" Rosebud Rob asked, his curiosity now fully awakened.

"Who I am it is best you should not know," was the reply. "It is enough for you to know that I last night was forced to become a member of Diablo's band, in preference to death. After a frightful initiation, I was sent out again upon your trail—to hunt you to death. You see how faithfully I am obeying the orders of the chief. By my soul, they shall find me a coal of fire in their hands, before they get through with me, that will scorch and burn them at every touch. Heed my warning, and be watchful, lest they surprise you!"

Then turning, the masked forewarner stole softly from the room, and descended the stairs, which were dark, the lights having all been put out for the night; the occupants had retired, hours before.

Softly opening the door, he stepped out into the night.

All was dark, the moon being in under a cloud; and the gulch was nearly deserted by people, a few drunken stragglers being the only ones abroad.

No, not the only ones, for as the masked man stepped out into the open air, three others quickly surrounded him, they all being masked like himself, and wearing long, gown-like cloaks.

"Sh!" one said, as the disguised prowler leaped back and drew a stout lignum-vites club from under his covering; nor did he wait for a conclusion of the warning, but springing forward like a panther, he laid out the first two at a stroke.

The other gent of the night evidently had no aspirations to share the others' fate, and turning, he bolted for dear life.

Photograph Phil—for it was he who had visited Rosebud Rob—gave vent to a low laugh, as he watched his Infernal Brother dash away into the darkness.

"Too much of a good thing was not to his taste," the young Sleuth muttered. "Now, then, let's see who these fine birds look like with their masks off, and then I'll lay low, for the old reprobate, Diablo, will soon replace his spies. Hope I've not killed the rascals, as much as they deserve death!"

Producing a small-sized pocket bull's-eye lantern, he knelt beside the two men whom his club had felled senseless to the earth.

Shoving back the slide, a tiny bar of light shot out into the night, which he threw full into the faces of the two outlaws after removing their masks.

Their faces were smooth, and he could not remember ever having seen them before, but upon their foreheads was a mark which could never be erased—a burnt disfigurement of letters which formed into a single livid word—"Diablo."

"Ha! ha! as I thought! they were shadows set to watch upon my trail. Let me see: their pulses beat, and they live. Shall I not finish 'em up and done with it? No, I'll be more merciful than that—I'll bind and leave them here for the Vigilantes to string up."

He soon had them fixed to suit his notion; then, rising to his feet, he removed his mask, and strode down into the center of the gulch.

All of a sudden the moon burst out from its concealment, and flooded mother Earth with an unsurpassed brilliancy of mellow light.

Photograph Phil started forward, now, with a half exclamation. The girl, Millicent Vere, had been crossing his path a few steps away, when the moon burst forth, but started to run when she saw him so close.

It required but a few flying leaps to overtake her, which he did, and placing a hand upon her shoulder, wheeled her about facing him.

"Don't be in a hurry, please," he said, in an authoritative tone. "As a guardian of the night, I have a right to interview all those abroad after the midnight hour. Where have you been?"

"None of your business, sir! Release me, or I shall cry for help!" the girl gasped, endeavoring to break from his grasp.

"In which case I shall choke blazes out of you," Phil assured. "See here! I don't want no fussiness out of you, but plain, straight answers to my questions. You're too pretty a girl to hurt for ordinary trifles, but you must pony up, or I shall hurt you, undoubtedly. Now, then, what fetches you out so late at night?"

"It matters not to you, sir!" the girl replied, haughtily. "Your insolence is unpardonable."

"Maybe you don't recognize me?"

"Yes—I do not often forget faces."

"Well, you haven't answered my last question, yet."

"Nor do I intend to, more than to say that I was not out for any evil purpose."

"I doubt the truth of that statement, miss, for few women are out for any good after midnight. However, let that question give way to another. What do you know of Diablo and his Infernal Band?"

The eyes of the Boy Sleuth were fixed upon her face in a searching gaze—he expected to mark some change, but there was none. The face was passive and white; the eyes lustrous and jetty—indignant, in their expression.

"I know nothing of the parties you mention—why should I?"

"You do know all about them!" Phil asserted, sternly. "You dropped a passport at my feet, the other night, bearing a skull and cross-bones. That admitted me into the Temple of Bacchus, and I was made a member of the so-styled Infernal Forty!"

A dilation of Millicent Vere's eyes was the only answer.

"I have to thank you for the pain I endured during that accursed initiation, and since. Girl, do you know what you are?—a thief, an outlaw, and a murderer."

"No! no! God help me, not so bad as that!" she gasped, the moonlight reflecting a paler shade upon her face. "You tell what is untrue. I know nothing—nothing."

"Hush! do not perjure your soul by more lying!" warned the young Sleuth. "Do you know that I could have you strung up for complicity in that bank robbery, and the murder of poor Mark Manners and Caruthers?"

The girl put up her hand, as if to ward off a blow—staggered back, with a gasp.

"Devil! who are you?"

"One who knows all," Photograph Phil replied. "I have all power over you, and you must assist me!"

"How?" There was a tith of eagerness in her tone now.

"By obeying me, and bulldozing that cuss, Diablo. What obligations bind you to his service?"

She hesitated.

"Tell me. It will be your own salvation to make a clean breast of it."

"I am under no sworn obligations to the chief, except that it has been to my interest to serve him," was the reply. "Since you have asked me, I will tell you that my brother was a member of Diablo's band—unbeknown to my mother, who is old and infirm. My brother did not wish to worry her. At last, my brother was doomed to die, by drawing lots against a new member, and I was sent for, and he entreated me to promise that I would

lure as many into the trap as possible, and would marry the chief, Diablo."

"And you promised?"

"I did."

"Foolish girl! But never mind; you shall break that promise, and turn your hand against that man, Diablo."

"No! no! I cannot, sir!—oh! I—"

"Dry up! I say you shall, and that settles it," Photograph Phil said, sternly. "Go home now, and await a call from me. My name is Photograph Phil, and when I want you you'll get my card, when I shall expect you to hunt me up. Do you hear?"

"Y-es!"

"Then mind that you heed. Disobey me, or attempt treachery, and up you go to the limb of a tree, for complicity in the murder of Mark Manners. I know all. Your own life is in what you do; and your life is the price of silence and obedience. Now go!"

She needed not the second command, but sped away with the swiftness of a deer.

"A strange, confoundedly-perplexing character!" Phil muttered, as he strode away toward his tent. "I must use her for my strong card, but must be wary, or she will flip me yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS PRISCILLA'S ROMEO—BESS'S LOVE.

THREE days passed. Three glorious, late autumnal days, such as cause the hearts of lovers to beat high with romantic fervor and peaceful joy—three golden days, with fairest of blue and sunny skies, and gentle flower-perfumed breezes, when the miner lingered at his work to gaze dreamily at the beautiful, but rugged landscape, variegated into many hues by the turning of the leaves—when the elk and doe frisked through the forest glades, and all nature, even to the babbling brooks, seemed overjoyed by these last few dreamy Indian-summer days, before cold, remorseless winter should come rushing onward with its stinging breath and icy arms outstretched.

In Cascade Gulch the lapse of three days had caused no particular change in the routine of daily life.

At his primitive art gallery, Photograph Phil was winning not only money, but golden opinions for the excellent work turned out with his photograph "masheen." Not only had he taken pictures for innumerable persons, and added much to the size of his Rogues' Gallery, but he had taken several noble landscape views, which he had sold for good sums.

At the cabin of John Mason, miner, pretty Jennie was settled down quietly into the family, and was really enjoying herself.

She had enough to do to keep her busy, in gathering flowers when there was no work to do at the cabin. Sometimes she would take sewing and wander to the banks of Cascade Creek, and sit under the great cottonwood, where, in former days, Idyl Abbey had sat. She never, however, wandered far from the cabin, her movements ever being held in check by a dread of meeting Lucas Alyne.

John Mason was a big man, and likewise had a big heart. Therefore, as Jennie was considered a child of adoption, many donations of money and trinkets were pressed upon her.

Somehow she had grown into the habit of asking after the whereabouts of Rosebud Rob, since he did not come to the cabin, but Mason ever avoided a direct answer, careful not to mention about the Sport's hurt.

John Mason was more than kind to his pretty ward, but no more watchful and devoted was he over her than was Baltimore Bess over the Sport, who still lay upon the bed, unable to get out of his room, for the physician had pronounced it dangerous for him to move upon his feet, inside of a week, or five days, at least.

Bess had been almost constantly by his bedside, studying his every need, and flying to do his bidding as a loving sister would have done, only with perhaps more eagerness.

She was not the same creature now, that he had known as Baltimore Bess, the dare-devil—at least not the same in attire, roughness and manner of speech.

She was gentle, womanly, tender.

She endeavored to repress all traces of jealousy, and when Rosebud Rob did not mention Jennie—fair, sweet-tempered Jennie Grey, she quite succeeded.

Everything that could be done for the Sport's comfort, she did, even to sitting by his bedside and reading to him as the brilliant afternoon sunlight would stream in through the single window of the room.

And it was not strange that a man of Rosebud Rob's great experience, should grow as he did, more and more interested as each day dragged by—golden days that possessed a quiet enjoyment with him, despite his pain—perhaps because the pretty shadow of a devoted woman hovered ever nigh. For he could not hide it from his eyes, his mind, his conscience, this Sport, that his faithful watcher loved him—not as the world loves, not as man or woman usually love, but with an unconquerable passion—a self-sacrificing love that, when confined, with no outflow, amounted almost to a bitterness, so intense was it.

Not blind could the Sport be to this—the whole conviction came to him like a flash—a glimpse as though photographed.

He knew, moreover, that her quiet, seeming content, was but a smoldering of the flame into the real haze that again concealed the flame—he knew that she could not be put off as Idyl Abbey had been put off; he knew, in fact, that the whole volume of

affection from Bess's heart, was his to discard or keep.

It would not be long ere the bubble would burst, either—only a matter of time, when he should leave that bed and go out into the world and the presence of Jennie Grey.

Then, the storm would burst—he looked for it—knew it would come.

And what should he say—do?

It was a vexatious question which constituted one of his chief thoughts, as he lay bolstered up on the bed—a question that fretted and chafed his spirit, for he could not foresee the end of the matter for the life of him.

In the meantime, somewhat of a sensation had struck the town.

It was in the shape of the Reverend Lucas Alyne, who had literally taken to the "stump," and nightly preached to such as would congregate to listen to his discourse.

He was evidently a smart man, from the way he rolled out rhetoric and quotations from the Holy Book; people, especially the sisters, who gathered under the moonlight to hear him, pronounced him an exceptionally smart man.

The flock of lambs who congregated to listen to the sermons were generally miners' wives, to the number of a couple of hundred, just fresh from the kitchen, with hatless heads and sleeves to the elbow.

Occasionally a pilgrim could be defined among the scattered crowd, perhaps perched upon a stump, but as a general thing the spouses of these aforesaid seekers after truth, in nineteen cases out of twenty, were congregated in some of the neighboring saloons engaged in the edifying and lucrative "amusement" of playing "whisky poker."

Among the audience of the feminine persuasion Miss Priscilla Mason did appear.

A thorough-going Christian Miss Priscilla undoubtedly was. And when it came to pass that Sister Jones praised the new and good man, Priscilla "went" forthwith. And she arrayed herself in the best out of her wardrobe, and took a front seat upon the ground to listen to the discourse of the eminent Biblical philosopher who had strayed so far among the perils of the wilderness.

And when she caught the beaming and enthusiastic gaze of the good man riveted upon her, she blushed and felt pleased.

Could it be possible—but oh, no! there must be some mistake. She was nearing the grave, and ugly at that. What man could be so impartial to the beauty gathered around him as to gaze for a single instant at her?

Ah! a thought struck her.

Perhaps it was the beauty of heart—of soul—which he was searching for? If so, could not she show as fair a record as the rest of her sisters? Happy thought!

So, when she looked up again, his kindly glance was bent earnestly upon her, and she blushed a second time; the beloved brother's eyes beamed, and Miss Priscilla was as rosy as a school-girl throughout the sermon.

This was upon the first night, and Lucas Alyne, designing hypocrite, had played his cards well, for Miss Priscilla went to her humble couch to dream of the gifted servant of the Lord.

John Mason knew nothing of Miss Priscilla's visit to the meeting, or he would have put a stop to it, as he thoroughly despised the man who could war against pretty Jennie Grey. So that Priscilla carried the secret of her visit and guarded it.

The next night she had gone again.

And through the kindness of Sister Jones, our old maid was formally presented to the "preacher," who, after the sermon escorted her to her home, but left her at the door.

From that time on, unknown to either Jennie, or to her brother, Miss Priscilla and the parson met, and while in the heart of the aged girl there was awakened the first love-flame of her life, Lucas Alyne plead his case with the ardor of a seventeen-year-old lover, who had mastered the languages and committed Milton and Byron to memory. But an obstacle stood in the path of the two aged lovers—John Mason, and the girl, Jennie.

"But for them, dear Lucas, how gladly would I invite thee to my home, instead of coming out here like a thief to meet you beneath the stars and moon."

"I would, dearest, sweetest Priscilla, that it could be even so," he would reply, with a sigh. "What sweet comfort it would be to see thee ever in my presence, dear Priscilla. If you could ever coax your brother to admit me to your table as a boarder—"

"Ah! If I but could!" with a deeper sigh. "Oh! cruel fate beneath that binds me to a stern brother's will. My sweet Lucas—hero of my life, if you could but disguise yourself, and get into John's favor—"

The Virginian started at the suggestion.

"It can easily be done, my darling, and for the love of you, I will make the daring attempt. All's fair in love or war, you know, and the line applies directly to our case. So fare thee well, my precious, and if a stranger enter thy home, mum's the word, until we are alone. So long as I can keep the secret I bid fair to remain by thy side."

And they bided and cooed like turtle-doves, there under the moonlight, until it was time for the smitten Priscilla to seek her home.

On the afternoon of the following day, (the fourth, by the way, of Rosebud Rob's confinement to his bed) Jennie Gray took a book from John Mason's meager collection, and wandered down to the old cottonwood upon the banks of the rushing creek.

She had grown less and less expectant of meeting with her foes, and the old cottonwood furnished delightful shelter, under which to sit and read.

Not long had she been seated, however, ere she heard a heavy footstep, and looked up with a startled cry, to behold Jean Alyne standing but a few paces away, regarding her with his evil gaze.

"Oh! ho!" he exclaimed; "so my pretty bird is caught at last, eh?"

"No, Jean Alyne! your bird is not caught, at all!" Jennie cried, springing to her feet, quickly. "Why have you come here, sir?"

The young Virginian chuckled horribly, as he stepped nearer.

"Why have I come here?" he growled, a sinister glow upon his bruised and bloated features. "Wal, you ought to know. Haven't you always been my friend, and haven't I always been yours? Hey, we were allus sweet on each other, weren't we?"

"Fool!" the ward of John Mason replied, contemptuously. "I don't believe two mortals ever despised each other more than you and I. Go, sir! your presence is disgusting."

"Humph! you're as sassy as a gander, girl. Perhaps I do look rather dilapidated, for I've been handled rough, since I came here. See here! do you know what I came here for this afternoon?"

"No! nor do I wish to know, so leave my presence!"

"Wal, I'll tell you," he said, with a leer. "Oh! ye needn't try to escape for I can outrun ye, an' no one looks up this way often. Wal, I come up here to conciliate."

"What?" Jennie gasped, an expression of mingled surprise and disgust upon her face.

"To conciliate," he repeated. "You see the old man's set a trap for you that you're bound to fall into, an' as the old man an' I've had a fallin' out, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take you, and we'll go to some other place and get married. Then his reverence can bounce."

"Oh! ain't you kind!" Jennie cried, contemptuously. "If that is what you came here to say, you can go. I would even consider the proposition of wedding your rascally father ere I'd look at you. Go!"

"Hang you, no!" he growled. "I'll have you, anyhow. My horse is near, and you'll be off in the mountains before you know it. Get ready—here I come!" he said, gathering his strength evidently for a leap upon her.

"And here you go!" and springing from a fringe of willows which grew upon the bank of the creek, as he gave vent to the cry, John Mason seized the Virginian about the waist, raised him above his head by the strength of his powerful arms, and hurled him headforemost into the rushing waters of the stream.

"There, you land-shark! maybe you'll tackle a defenseless girl again just for the fun of it! Come, Miss Jennie, I will accompany you to the cabin, where you will be safe."

There had been two eye-witnesses to the scene, from a distance—Baltimore Bess and the wounded Sport.

The head of his bed lay close beside the open window, and commanded a full view of the cottonwood on the banks of the rushing creek.

Rosebud Rob had seen the trim, pretty figure of Jennie Grey go down to the cool resort. Bess had also seen her as she sat at the window with an open book in her hand. Then both saw Jean Alyne rise and confront the defenseless girl.

"Bring me a rifle!" the Sport cried, excitedly. "My nerves are not so unsteady but that I can drop that fellow, curse him!"

"Stop! there is no need for you to interfere," Bess said, jubilantly. "The young lady has a protector in John Mason. How opportune that he was waiting in the covert to meet her!"

It was just then that the miner had leaped from the bushes and tossed the Virginian into the stream.

"Just opportune enough to prevent me taking revenge upon the accursed Virginian," the Sport growled, with a frown. "Mason is taking Miss Grey toward the cabin. Now, go on with the piece you were reading to me, Bess."

That evening, just as dusk was creeping over the room, the physician came in, and after an examination, thought it practicable for the Sport to leave his bed and take very moderate exercise in the open air.

It was joyful news to Rosebud Rob, for he had grown heartily sick and tired of lying abed, and as soon as Bess came in he communicated the intelligence to her, dreading the result.

It was not far from what he had looked for—had expected from the first. She sat down beside the bed, with a face which had suddenly grown very pale.

"You won't go yet?" she said, almost pleadingly. "Stay until you are better able to care for yourself. Surely you can bear a few more days before going back to her—"

"Don't, Bess; you agitate yourself without cause. Why will you persist in having it that Miss Grey is anything to me? Why, she is almost a total stranger to me."

"You admire her—at least you cannot deny that?" she accused, her face half averted, while glistening tears suffused her eyes. "You will not deny that?"

"Why should I? Is there harm in it?"

"Yes, there is harm in it," she replied, earnestly, "because for you to fall in love with that girl, and wed her, would be my death-blow."

She hastily arose as she finished speaking, as if to leave the room, but Rosebud Rob caught her sleeve, and pulled her back to her chair, when she burst into tears, and buried her face in the cover.

"Bess," he said, gravely, "is this equivalent to a

confession from you, of love for me? Can it be possible that you, a sensible, sound-minded girl, can have seen aught in me to admire—to love?"

"Need I answer you *yes*?" she said, rallying, and looking into his face with her tearful eyes. "Need I tell you *yes*, when you have known it, all along—ever since the girl came, and have been struggling bravely for the mastery of yourself? Oh! I have known of your struggle—have read each thought you allowed to pass through your mind. Tell me truthfully, Mr. Mapleton, have you gained mastery over yourself?"

"I have," he replied, earnestly.

"And you have decided—"

"In favor of Miss Grey. Bess, can you ever forgive me for thus wounding you—can you think of me as one who wants your friendship? I know I do not deserve your love, but—"

"You shall have my love until I die," she replied, in a choked voice, and drawing him quickly toward her she kissed him, passionately—once—twice—thrice; then sprung from the room and ended the interview.

She did not return, and it dawned upon him, then, that Baltimore Bess had gone away from his love-life.

She passed him as he sat upon the front steps, an hour later in company with a physician who had brought him down, but her musical "good-evening" possessed a metallic ring.

She was attired in her old dare-devil character suit, and armed to the teeth, but made no mention of her destination.

"A daring, a handsome woman," the physician said, when she was out of hearing. "The winner of her would possess a treasure, and a faithful, loving partner for life."

And, yet, I had the courage to refuse the priceless affection of Bess, for the little fairy down at John Mason's! the Sport mused, to himself. "I am almost tempted to call myself a fool, and yet—yet—hang me if I know which I like the best."

But it was little use to repent now, for Bess was gone, and he did not know that he should ever see her again, so he turned his thoughts upon Jennie Grey.

He could see her in his mind's eye, but—but she did not seem quite the same to him now, as she had before.

His reverie was broken by a touch upon the shoulder.

"I guess it would be best for you to go inside now, Mapleton. One more night's solid rest will fix you all right, so that you can get out in the morning."

Rosebud Rob obeyed, and went back to the room for the night.

In the morning, he was up and out in the gulch with the rising of the sun. He felt like himself again, for all an occasional twinge of pain came from his breast, where the wound was healing as fast as nature would permit.

Many acquaintances flocked around him and welcomed him back to their midst, among them Photograph Phil and John Mason.

"And by the way," the brawny miner remarked, with a good-natured laugh, "I've been turnin' over in my mind the feasibility of turnin' in an honest penny at keepin' boarders, as well as digging gold. There's Priscilla says she is willin' to keep care on 'em, what with the aid of the little gal, Jennie, she's well able to do. So thar's two chaps as want good board and are good to pay for it, so I reckon we'll have to take 'em in."

"Who are these men?" Rosebud Rob asked, glancing toward the cabin.

"Oh! both o' them miners and prospectors—one o' 'em from Nevada, and t'other from Arizona. Both old timers, I reckon."

"What is their name?"

"Oh! one calls himself Jeff Harkins, and the other's name is Bill Greeland. He is the pilgrim who lost so much bullion by the bank robbery. He war well heeled before, but is pretty low now, I reckon—least, so they say."

Bidding the miner good-day, the Sport sauntered from place to place, expecting to find Bess.

But she was not to be found, nor did anybody seem to know what had become of her.

The day passed without incident. The Sport did not visit Jennie Grey. He fought shy, perhaps out of respect for the feelings of Baltimore Bess, whom he believed not far away.

As Bess had signified her intention of not returning soon, Mrs. Lyoniel still permitted the Sport to occupy the room where he had lain during confinement.

He retired that night, and tried to sleep; but it was a poor job at the best, and he was wide awake about midnight, when Mrs. Lyoniel burst open his door.

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Mapleton!" she cried, "Diablo and his gang have surrounded my cabin!"

CHAPTER IX. PHIL ON A NEW TACK.

She then rushed back down the hall to alarm the rest of her boarders.

Rosebud Rob slid from the bed into his boots and hunting-shirt with wonderful alacrity, and with the exception of putting on his hat and belt, was all ready for the work; for, like the average border-man, his breeches he never removed on retiring at night.

Bess had fetched his rifle from his hotel when he was first hurt, so that he possessed that in addition to his six-shooters.

Below stairs the pounding at the heavily-barred door was loud and peremptory.

Enough was it to arouse every man, woman and child in the cabin.

A plucky little woman was Mrs. Lyoniel, and she bravely descended to the lower floor, although she was careful not to open the door.

"What's wanted?" she demanded, in a shrill voice. "Why do you come disturbing honest people at the dead of night?"

"Keep still in there," replied a hoarse voice. "Do you wish to arouse the town? Open the door and let us in. We want to get the Sport, Rosebud Rob, and then we will go away."

"You can't get in, nor you can't have Rosebud Rob, you ugly robber!" the widow replied, sharply. "So go away and mind your business."

"Come! no more tongue, but open up, or down comes your hash factory on a run. Boys, get the torches, and set fire to the shebang, if she don't open up inside of a jiffy!" cried the voice of the leader, who had previously announced himself to be Diablo.

At this juncture Rosebud Rob, from his window, opened fire upon the gang below with his revolvers, and succeeded in dropping four of them ere a rattling of bullets forced him to dodge back.

Howls of rage now came from below, and the chief of the Infernal Forty swore and yelled alternately.

"A hundred dollars for a ladder!" he roared. "Fire the cabin! If we can't get them out one way, we can another."

From the upper windows of the cabin Rosebud Rob and the remainder of the boarders kept up a fire, but seldom made an effective shot, as the outlaws had retreated to the shelter of the northern and southern ends of the cabin, where there were no windows.

Presently the smell of smoke and the crackling of flames warned the inmates that the cabin had been fired.

They were destined to burn up in the merciless flames unless—

Rosebud Rob comprehended the result, and stepping forward to where the most of the inmates were congregated upon the landing, he said:

"It's no use to hold out against the ruffians. I will deliver myself up, and thereby save the rest of you."

"Hold up!" cried the physician; "you will do nothing of the kind. The town people are coming to our assistance."

He spoke truly.

By glancing through the window, the Sport saw that miners and citizens were turning out *en masse*, and rushing toward the scene of conflagration.

The outlaws had seen their approach, too, evidently, for with baffled yells they leaped upon their horses, and spurred away up the stage-road, among the bluffs, carrying their wounded with them, and had effectually escaped before pursuit could be made.

When they were gone, the inmates of the burning cabin escaped into the open air, and the flames were put out without much difficulty, but little damage to the cabin having been done.

The road-agents did not return that night, although a look-out was kept for them, by the Vigilance Committee, until the rosy day dawned again.

In the morning Rosebud Rob took a walk to John Mason's cabin, and found Miss Priscilla and Jennie washing dishes, from the breakfast.

He sat down in the doorway, and chatted with them for an hour, then arose to go, as no opportunity was afforded him to see the miner's ward alone.

"By the way, we have two new boarders," Miss Priscilla announced, "just came to breakfast, for the first this morning, and went away to work. If we could have a lively soul like you to board, it would be so much more pleasant—wouldn't it, Jennie?"

"Yes, indeed, aunty," the ward of John Mason replied, a blush stealing over her cheek. "It would, I think."

Rosebud Rob called upon Photograph Phil, next, before returning to his room at Mrs. Lyoniel's. The young artist was busy in preparing for the usual day's rush, but greeted the Sport warmly enough.

"I have come to see you on business which is of greatest importance," Rosebud Rob said. "I have been putting this and that together, and have come to the conclusion that you are the masked individual, who visited me at the widow's, and warned me to look out for Diablo. Am I not right?"

"Yes, you are right," Photograph Phil replied, glancing about to see that nobody was within earshot. "I came masked, but for all my pains was laid for by a trio of the devil's own band, two of whom I grounded, as nicely as you please. I bound them and left 'em lying in the gulch, but they somehow got away before the next morning."

"Very well. You told me you were forced into this gang, and that you were their bitterest enemy."

"So I am."

"Then listen. I am going to break up that gang, or die in the attempt. To-day a fresh reward has been offered for their capture, and the whole sum now offered amounts to three thousand dollars, part of which you shall share if you will help me with my plans."

"You can depend upon me, reward or no reward. I've no love for these outlaws, you may rest assured."

"Such being the case, it will be a part of your business to set fire to this so-styled temple of Bacchus, which you say is the head-quarters of the gang. First, however, tell me—is there not an underground passage leading to some other retreat?"

"There is. It descends from the floor, and from the bottom of a shaft worms its way northward to a mountain-locked pocket or cavern."

"As I thought. There is a passage under yonder

cascade, which, no doubt, leads to this identical place. Now, then, to-morrow night, when you can fire the old rookery without being seen, do so, and in a way that cannot fail to demolish the building. Then lay low, and keep a watch upon the two men who are boarding at John Mason's. See that they don't get an opportunity to work any villainy, should that be their purpose; also, keep an eye on the young lady, Miss Grey."

"Is this all I am to do to aid you?"

"It is enough. You may find your hands full, in the bargain. I will undertake the rest. If I am wanted, hunt up the passage in under the rocks, and blow a shrill whistle. I, or some one in my service, will hear it."

Then after a few more instructions, the Spotter Sport strode away toward his lodgings. As he entered the doorway, he came face to face with a man who was coming out—a brawny, bewiskered individual, with a kindly face, and the attire of a miner and prospector.

"Hello! maybe you are the pilgrim I'm hunting after," he said, blocking the passage with his brawny proportions. "Maybe you are the fellow they call Rosebud Rob?"

"There can be little doubt that you are gazing upon the genuine representative of that name," the Sport replied, with a smile. "What is your handle, may I be so bold as to inquire?"

"My name reads, Bill Greeland, miner, at the election polls," the other replied. "If you are Rosebud Rob, who is in the mouth of every galoot in the gulch, you're the pilgrim I want to see."

"Then walk up to my room with me, and unravel your business," the Sport replied, "though I marvel that there is anything left of me to give you audience, if I am in so many cannibalistic mouths."

They ascended to the Sport's chamber, and the man from Nevada took a chair facing the Sport.

"The reason I hunted you up," he said, "was because I heard that you were going to take a hunt after the robbers who broke open the bank, and relieved me of my whole fortune, some two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in gold."

"Yes, I am just about taking the trail, now, as soon as I can get ready. I suppose you want me to put in a plea for your pile, eh?"

"Exactly. I want you to regain possession of that gold, if possible, and turn it over to me. Yours shall then be a rich reward."

"I shall not forget your case. In the meantime, as you are stopping at Mason's, you will perhaps do me a favor, in exchange."

"Most certainly; you have but to name it, and I promise."

"It is that you keep a protecting eye upon the young lady who is stopping there, under the temporary guardianship of John Mason, where I placed her out of reach of a rascally guardian, who has proven her worst enemy."

A faint smile passed over the miner's face, as he stroked his long beard.

"I ain't much of a hand for lookin' after women," he said, "but I'll keep an eye as you request to the girl's welfare. She is a pretty one, and no doubt at least one heart beats in sympathy with her own."

"Thank you for the sling-shot," Rosebud Rob replied, with a smile. "No doubt but that she has."

Greeland soon took his departure, and then the Spotter Sport prepared for his solitary adventure. Stocking his haversack with cold meats, and filling his ammunition box with fresh cartridges, he laid out two pairs of revolvers and a knife for use, after which he threw himself upon the bed, to await the falling of night again, when he could go to work, safely.

Miss Priscilla Mason was not a bad woman in principle, but simply love-blinded. She could not believe that she was doing wrong in keeping the Reverend Lucas Alyn in secret under her roof, consoling her accusing conscience with the reasoning that they were soon to be made one and inseparable. For had not the divine man told her so, upon bended knee, many times over, when they were out in under the stars?

And now he was safely harbored under her sheltering roof, where there would be many a chance for a quiet lovers' talk. But though there was a great satisfaction in believing this, the spinster was puzzled. Of her two boarders, she did not know which was the parson and which was not.

Narrowly and eagerly during the first morning and noon meals she did watch both, expecting a sign from her disguised lover. But none came, and she had to quiet her aged, pulsating heart until she should be able to decide.

That night, after supper, Mr. Greeland went into the parlor, while Mr. Harkins slouched on his hat, lit a pipe, and tramped away out into the gulch.

"That settles it," Priscilla mused, her heart thumping so loud that she was frightened lest Jennie should hear it. "Mr. Greeland is my dear Lucas. What a clever actor he is, too! Dear, sweet Lucas! how I love him!"

The dishes were never washed so rapidly as to-night, when the spinster was all anxiety to have an interview with her reverend lover. At last they were all wiped and washed, and Jennie was gone on an errand to a neighboring store.

Then Miss Priscilla brushed back her silver-threaded locks, tied a fresh ribbon at her throat, and stole on tip-toe to the parlor of the cabin. At the threshold she paused and peeped in. Mr. Greeland was ensconced in a chair, with his back toward her, and his heels protruding through the open window. Such a shocking posture for a minister to assume, too, she thought, and, horror of horrors! he was juggling away at a pipe ten per cent. grimmer than that Mr. Harkins had lit when he went out.

But, the poor dear soul, he must have some com-

furt in his lonely bachelor's life," she murmured, under her breath. "I'll just steal on tip-toe and surprise him, bless him!"

And she was successful in gliding across the floor noiselessly, and assuming a position directly in the rear of his chair without his knowledge of her presence.

"Oh, my sweet, sweet darling!" she said, the next moment, and throwing her arms about his neck, she drew his head around, and implanted several warm kisses upon his forehead.

"Heavens and earth!" gasped the astounded man, tearing from her embrace, and confronting her. "What in the deuce do you mean, woman, a coming slobbering around me? Hang me if it isn't the landlady at that!"

"Aha! my sweet lover in disguise, 'tis no longer use for you to play off when I recognize you full well," and Miss Priscilla would have given him a playful slap, but he leaped back with a grunt of disgust.

"See here, old lady," he growled, keeping her at arm's length, "this won't do, at all. What do ye mean? Are ye crazy, or what? Blast my rocks ef I ever was in such a predicament!"

And to impart excitement to the scene, both John Mason and Jennie stepped into the room at this moment.

"Lordy!" the big miner gasped. "What kind of a circus is this? Priscilla, woman, what do you mean?"

Poor Priscilla! Here were all her fondest hopes nipped in the bud. At the sound of her brother's voice, she sunk quietly to the floor in a swoon.

She was soon revived, however, and sent to her room in disgrace.

Bill Greeland explained as well as was in his power, and thus the incident came to a close, and was hushed up for poor Priscilla's sake.

John Mason was extremely puzzled over his sister's conduct, and could in no way account for it.

Probably the feelings of Miss Priscilla can better be imagined than described by us. She was conscious that she had made an awkward blunder, and she inwardly censured her truant lover for not making himself known to her.

On the following morning she received a sly look from Mr. Jeff Harkins, which satisfied her that she had seen the right man at last.

After breakfast she met him in the parlor, where her unfortunate meeting with Greeland had occurred. Nobody was in the house, John Mason having taken Jennie with him down to his claim, and Bill Greeland having gone off on a hunt to the mountains.

"You are a fool!" the disguised Virginian cried, as Miss Priscilla sunk upon a stool by his side—"a consummate fool! Why did you make such a deuced mis-"

"Oh don't, Lucas!" she interrupted, imploringly—"don't! or you'll lacerate my heart. I thought it was you."

"Well, take care that you don't make any more mistakes, or they may lead to the detection of our little lovers' plot. Priscilla, my dear, report brings to me the story that thy brother has a goodly supply of golden wealth."

"You must not listen to idle gossip, dear Lucas," was the evasive reply.

"Nay, 'tis no idle gossip, an' thou knowest it, my star! Tell me where this gold is kept, and the amount thereof, my Priscilla, for the Great Adviser hath sent me strange warnings concerning it—told me to watch over and guard it, as a brother, for a brother, lest robbers should carry it away."

"Mercy! then I must fly to tell my brother!" Priscilla gasped, in alarm.

"Nay, stay!" the plotter commanded. "Tell not thy brother, that it shall worry him, but tell me, that I may smite the Philistines, and win favor in thy brother's eyes."

"My noble hero," Priscilla cried, her heart pulsating afresh. "How I admire your noble traits! My brother's gold is in the cellar, in a wooden box, and amounts in all to ten thousand dollars' worth. Oh! if it should be stolen, what would we ever do! Oh! dear, Brother John would go crazy."

"Fear not about Brother John," the reverend rascal said. "The robbers will have to pass a mountain of rock, in my holy self, to achieve a victory."

Jennie Grey had gone down to the claim with John Mason, but the labor of washing sand was monotonous, and ere the first hour had passed, the pretty Virginian was over at Photograph Phil's studio, looking over his pictures, with a great deal of gravity and interest.

"It must be very nice work to take pictures," she said, looking up into Phil's face, as he deftly arranged a new stack for her inspection.

"Well, rather, ma'am; it depends if a fellow is naturally lazy, or not. If you find one of the chaps, like myself, for instance, who's made up his mind that he'll get through the world on cheek, and as little work as he can—he's the chap suited for a picture-gallery, every time."

"Then, you are not partial to work, eh?" Jennie asked, her big blue eyes roving over the jolly face of the young artist. "You despise manual labor?"

"When I can make an honest livelihood by my wits," Phil replied, with a laugh. "You see, nature gave me an unlimited installment of cheek, with a keen sight, and an unusual allowance of tongue, so between the three, I manage to eke out about as good a living as the men who toil all day with the spade and shovel."

"You are a strange young man!" the little Virginian said; then asked, candidly: "How old are you?"

"Grasping after manhood by a few months. May

I return the compliment of asking you a like question?"

"Certainly; I am 'most seventeen. Will you take my picture?"

"With all pleasure," Phil replied, gallantly.

The unabashed yet innocent *naïvete* of this little ward of John Mason was particularly charming—at least, in the eyes of the young artist.

Assisting her to a chair, he carefully arranged a series of screens and cloth scenery, after which he popped behind his "mashoeen." Next he went into a dark wigwam which he had erected, and soon came out again with the slide which he inserted, just as a pretty smile about the mouth of the fair Jennie revealed a glimpse of her pearly teeth.

The picture being a tin-type was soon finished, and Phil handed it over to the owner with considerable pride. For it was really well executed, the features and dress taking well, and the light and shade good.

"Oh!" Jennie exclaimed, as she glanced at it; "this is not I, sir."

"Most assuredly, yes. Do you not recognize yourself?"

"Well, I must give you praise. It is the very best picture I ever had taken. If I could only learn!"

"You can, perhaps, if I tarry in the gulch long enough."

"Oh! that's a good fellow! I begin to like you already. Will you come up to Mr. Mason's to-night, and teach me the first lesson?"

"The first lesson in what?" Phil laughingly asked. "In love?"

"Yes, if you are smart enough to do it," was the sharp but merry answer, as the light-hearted fairy went dancing away, like a butterfly on the wings of golden sunshine.

"You may bet I'll be there!" Phil said to himself, as he went back to retouching some card negatives.

"By Jove! it would be a huge joke if a fellow of my unpretentious bearing should succeed in winning the daisy away from that gallant, heroic Sport. There's been greater miracles accomplished, too. But stop! I have other work to do to-night!"

CHAPTER X. IN THE PASSAGE.

We must now return to the night previous, and to our Sport, Rosebud Rob.

After the departure of Bill Greeland, he threw himself upon the bed, and smoked and slept away the greater portion of the day, except when he was summoned below stairs to the noonday and evening meals.

He thought a great deal about Jennie Grey, and a great deal more concerning Baltimore Bess and her whereabouts.

She had not been seen since the previous evening. Where had she gone—what had she done?

This was the question which most puzzled the Sport.

He knew well her strange, impetuous nature—knew that she loved madly, passionately, and since the return had been refused her, would she not commit some rash act?

For instance, it would not be the first case on record where woman had committed suicide from disappointment in love matters.

This thought caused a pang of anxiety to enter the Sport's thoughts.

"Poor girl!" he muttered, rising from the bed, and gazing out of the window. "I showed her scanty gratitude for her kindness toward me. I almost wish I had not sent her off now, when I think seriously upon it. I should not have refused her at all, perhaps. Still, that pretty, witching face of Jennie Grey ever flits before me when I think of Bess."

It was a relief to him when night began to cast its shadows into the golden gulch, and the early moon dipped its bow in the east, preparatory to commencing its voyage across the blue dome of the heavens.

As soon as it was dark enough for his purpose, Rosebud Rob armed himself with revolvers, rifle and knife, and bidding adieu to the cabin, set out through the gulch toward the cascade, which poured down over the northern precipices with its accustomed din and roar.

As he passed along, he glanced into several saloons, hoping to catch a glimpse of the dare-devil Bess, but was disappointed. She had not been seen since the previous night.

"I shall have to proceed to my work, then, without seeing her," the Sport muttered, with disappointment. "I wonder what can have become of her? It would nerve me for my desperate work to get a glimpse of her face. Perhaps I have looked upon it for the last time! Something tells me that Bess has left the town, sad and sorrowing, poor girl; but it shall not be thus. I will follow her, after I have wooed and won Jennie—we will follow her and both make it our study to make her happy."

With these thoughts flitting through his mind he neared the cascade.

The cabin once occupied by the Abbess, still stood upon its former site, and was the only one in the immediate vicinity of the falls.

The other buildings were scattered further down the gulch.

The Abbey establishment had been wholly converted into a saloon, but being out of the popular current, was not largely patronized.

Glancing in, Rosebud Rob caught a glimpse of Jean Alyne and his two confederates, but saw nothing of Bess.

Passing on he approached the eastern side of the cascade, which tumbled from the rocks into a natural water worn basin, whence it debouched through the water-course. The sheet huzzed close against the wall of rock in front of which it fell, yet the Sport had previously discovered that a narrow foot-

ledge ran between the falling water and the rock, the entrance to it being screened by the constant mist.

It was right here that Rosebud Rob's perilous task commenced.

He had no knowledge of the passage, more than of its existence.

If indeed, it led to the retreat of the outlaws, it was more than probable that they would have it guarded. In which case there was one stumbling-block in the Sport's disfavor.

But, in knowing that he was to work for the right, and in the behalf of justice, he was resolved to stand for no obstacles, but cut down every thing in the shape of an enemy to his mission.

Not unprepared had he come, to do battle against these outlaws.

Before entering behind the falls, he donned a long and very heavy rubber coat, which was padded, and lined with buffalo hide. This would effectually shed the water, and with a black mask upon his face, gave him a brigandish appearance.

He was also equipped with a small dark lantern, which he carefully ignited, ere he stepped into the passage—a western Cave of Winds.

When he was prepared, with his coat well buttoned up about his head, he took the lantern in his left hand and his knife in the right, and stepped in under the cataract.

Instantly the thundering roar of a dozen cannons smote upon his hearing with deafening effect. The mist sprayed into his face and eyes, so that he could scarcely see.

The first step he took came near precipitating him into the roaring vortex.

He soon became aware that it would require the greatest care to keep upon the narrow footing, so he shot the slide of his lantern, whereupon a flood of light was diffused upon his surroundings.

But the falling mist prevented his seeing anything except a gray steam or vapor around him, and in under foot.

Carefully—step following step in feeling the uncertain passage, every nerve of the Sport was drawn to the highest tension—his knife hand kept ready for instant use.

For he knew not how soon he might encounter a deadly foe, upon whom it would be necessary for him to use the trusty blade.

On—on—on; at last the mist seemed to grow thinner, and the roar of the cascade less loud and deafening.

Then he paused, and turned out the light—that is, shot back the slide of his lantern, and all was densely dark.

"I must be pretty near out of this confounded passage," he muttered, swinging the lantern at his side, "and now, I must go it blind. I wonder how many guards I shall have to silence. Blood is a nasty thing to dabble in, but, nothing must stand in my path to-night."

With the stealth of a mouse he glided along, and soon had the satisfaction of discovering himself out of the mist, in a drier passage where footing was safe.

Here he paused again.

He was resolved not to go further until he had ascertained if there was a guard to the passage. Carefully groping about, he found a bowlder, and seated himself upon it. Knowing full well that he had his own time at his disposal, he resolved to take things coolly and by slow degrees.

Listening, he could not at first hear any suspicious sounds; only the roaring jar as of falling waters came to his hearing, from the direction of the misty passage.

But this fact was to him unsatisfactory in itself. He wanted to be sure, as all depended upon certainty.

If a guard was in the passage and had heard his coming or seen his light, he meant to tire his vigilance.

Fully an hour he sat upon the bowlder, and listened faithfully. It was much too dark for him to outline any objects further off than directly before his very eyes. A foe might easily have stood a yard away, and did he not betray his presence by some manner or move, it would not have been known by the watchful Sport.

But no enemy was so near, evidently, and growing tired of the silence, Rosebud Rob rose to his feet, intent upon following the further lead of the strange passage. As he did so, and attempted to peer ahead into the dense depths of blackness, something caught his sharp, never-failing eye, which caused him to sink back upon the bowlder with an exclamation.

It was like the flash of a spark upon some black object way off in the distance, which lasted but a moment, and then died out, utterly.

"Ha!" the Sport muttered. "There is a guard, but he is some distance away further up the passage. The flash was from an ignited match, no doubt, with which he lit his pipe. I wonder if he is coming this way?"

By pressing his ear close to the rocky floor, he was enabled to learn the affirmative. Regular steps, very faint, but yet perceptible, were coming down the passage, which, as near as the Sport could guess, ran in a north-westerly direction.

"It is the guard, undoubtedly, making his regular route," he decided, crawling back to his seat upon the bowlder. "It behooves me to lie low and keep still, and, perhaps, I shall escape his notice. Otherwise, I shall be obliged to tap him upon the head."

Nearer came the guard, his steps now quite audible, although they were all that denoted his coming.

Rosebud Rob crouched as far back as possible, with the hope that he might escape notice. Still nearer did the guard approach; then stopped, sud-

denly, in front of the spot where the Sport was crouching.

Firmly Rosebud Rob's fingers closed about the haft of his knife, and he prepared to spring upon his foe. But he did not, for he soon perceived that the guard was not aware of his presence, inasmuch as he seated himself upon the identical rock back of which the Sport was crouching, and began softly whistling some old-time tune.

Rosebud could have thrown his arm about his neck, so close was he to the intruder. He was certainly in a desperate situation, and was put to his wits for some resort to extricate himself from his difficulty.

For he did not know how soon the chap might discover his presence, and raise a hullabaloo and call others to his aid. A happy thought finally struck the Sport.

He would take the guard a prisoner!

It could be done easily enough, he concluded, upon reflection; all it required was a little risk.

Cautiously drawing his revolver, he waited until the guard was coughing, when he suddenly cocked it without the click, click, being noticed. The next minute the cold muzzle was pressed against the outlaw's temple, and the Sport caused his voice to speak, in a deep, stern tone:

"Stop! breathe but a word, or move a muscle, and I'll blow your blasted brains out! You are my prisoner, and unless you obey me to the letter, I'll shoot you so quick you can't speak!"

The fellow started, with a muttered curse, but made no attempt to reach toward his belt, as Rosebud could see by the aid of his lantern, which he had brought into play.

Reaching forward, he removed the weapons from his belt and appropriated them to his own use.

"Now you will please stand up and face about," the Sport ordered, in his commanding way.

The guard obeyed sullenly.

He recognized authority in the Sport's tones—knew that he would undoubtedly be as good as his word.

"Now, sir," Rosebud Rob said, following him to a standing position; "now, my jewel, do you perceive that my revolver is leveled on a squaw-gee with your life pulsator?"

"Yes, cuss yer!" was the reply.

"None of your cussin', you brute! This ain't no Mormon church, nor am I an Infjun missionary. I want you to obey, or drop you go, after which I shall assist you to a shower-bath in under the falls on a strictly Turkish plan. Did it ever fall to your lot to hear of a festive coon whose name is Rosebud Rob?"

The outlaw started and gave vent to an affirmative grunt.

"You he?"

"You stack your chips that I'm the precise character answering to that Sunday-school baptism. For instance, just cast your eyes upon my physiognomy!"

And off came the mask, and the coolly handsome face of the Sport was turned upon the outlaw.

"Well, what d'ye want o' me?" he demanded, surlily, seeming fully satisfied as to the identity of the "man to suit all circumstances."

"First, I want you to discard the wearing of your mask," Rosebud replied, as he restored his own to his face. "Nothing like knowing each other's cast of countenance, you see. It elevates and instructs."

"Guess I won't," the outlaw replied. "You never see'd me, though I've heard o' you in a casual way."

"All the same, take off that mask, just to please me and to save you the moderate expense of a six-foot hole in *terra firma*!"

The fellow obeyed.

Indeed, it would have been useless for him to have disobeyed, as the Sport's forefinger of his right hand hugged the trigger of his six-shooter, ready for action.

As soon as the guard tore away his mask, Rosebud Rob turned the full rays of the lantern upon his face—a rough, stubbly countenance the Sport could not remember of seeing before.

"What is your name?" he demanded.

"Jack Jillett," was the sullen reply.

"And you belong to this Diablo's Infernal gang?"

"Can't you read? Diablo's stamp is on my forehead plain enough."

"Yes—so I now perceive. Well, now what shall I do with you? Which way would it be best and easiest for you to die?"

"Not at all. It is unnecessary that I should die, you see, when I may be able to help you!"

"You help me?"

"Certainly. You've fairly caught me, and I surrender to your will. I need not tell you that I am not particularly in love with Diablo, and I'd just as soon be 'st up the league as not."

Rosebud Rob gazed at the man, sharply—searchingly.

"Do you mean this?" he asked, sternly. "Remember, the first sign of treachery I see, my knife shall hunt a passage into your heart!"

"I hear and understand," the outlaw replied, "and I mean all I say. If you will enlist me in your service, I will reward your confidence by strict attention to your commands!"

"By your language, I should judge you had been reared in different surroundings than these, sir?"

"Ay! I have seen better days, years ago, until whisky and gambling took me down the hill."

"What can you tell me about the secrets I wish to learn?"

"Much more than you think. I am general guard of the secret mine, and, in fact, of the whole concern. My orders are next only to the chief's, and none dare to question me but him. He seldom notices me."

"Good! Know you where the treasure of this robber band is stored?"

"I think I do, when I pass the spot fifty times each day."

"And you have access to the gold?"

"No! It is locked within an iron box, which Diablo had brought from Deadwood."

"How many modes of ingress and egress are there to the secret mine, then?"

"Three: one near where the toll-gate of Joaquin Muriete stands, another underground passage which comes up in under the temple of Bacchus, and the one we are in at present."

"Did you serve under Joaquin's flag?"

"I did. These passages were discovered together with the secret mine over a year ago, and Joaquin bound us together as a band to remain in the mine and work it for him, after our first captain, Nugget Ned, so strangely disappeared."

"He was a good master, eh?"

"Ay; better than either Joaquin or Diablo. The latter two are very much alike in cruelty and fierceness."

"Joaquin's life was embittered to some extent by the separation with his wife," the Sport said. "But, I must not tarry here. My business is to get into the secret mine, secure possession of the treasure that was in the Cascade City bank at the time of the robbery, capture as many of the outlaws as possible, and then get back into the outer world."

"Am I with you in the adventure?"

"Yes, if you promise to be faithful. One act of treachery upon your part, and I will kill you if it is the last act of my life."

"Ay, well I understand the terms. For, not only shall I be serving you, but fighting for that freedom I can never have until the Infernal Forty is out of existence."

"How many men has this Diablo under his control altogether?"

"Eighty odd, I believe, including the miners and the forty who run the road-agent business."

"We are two against eighty! Phew! an unhealthy aspect of affairs—for the eighty, I should say. We must play our cards slow but sure, in order to have any show for winning."

"Ay, all depends upon our success in one item," Jillett said.

"And what is that?"

"In slaying Diablo."

"But I wish to capture him."

"Nevertheless, take my advice and strike him down, at the first opportunity. The man is possessive of the devil. Allow him liberty and he will outwit old Satan himself, mark my words."

"I fear him not, and would rather capture him and deliver him up to justice. Come! let us move on, for I would to the work."

"Nay, you must not hurry. I will first go to the secret cavern, so that the way may be prepared. You remain here, and trust all to me. If I do not return before to-morrow night at this time, be not uneasy. All depends how successful I am in maturing my plans."

And after a few regulations between them, as to signals, and so forth, the outlaw stole noiselessly away, up the passage, leaving the Sport to make the best of his situation.

Which he proceeded to do.

Turning out his light, he threw himself upon a convenient rock, and went off into a light but refreshing slumber.

During which he was visited by a strange dream.

In it, he thought himself sitting in the room at Mrs. Lyonel's house, when two men entered bearing between them an inanimate form, to all appearances, which they carefully deposited upon the bed.

"Bess! Bess! my God! is this you?" the Sport cried.

A faint smile flitted across the deathly countenance of the dare-devil, as the Sport bent over her.

"Oh! it's but a stab in the side, from that Jean Alyne," she replied, with an attempt at her old time recklessness.

"It hasn't bled externally, but I'm fast filling up, inside. I am glad of it, Rosebud—I have been wanting to die, all along, but couldn't, till Alyne helped me. We were old enemies, and he did it with a good grace. I didn't want to live and see her yours, and now I am going before—and I am so glad—I am so—so glad—"

With a start the Sport awoke from his dream, and sat bolt upright, in a dripping perspiration.

"God grant that was a mockery—that hideous dream," he gasped.

Footsteps were coming down the passage, before him—friend or foe?

CHAPTER XI.

WOODING IMPROMPTU.

Leaving the Sport still in the passage, we must look on into the next day—ay, into the following night.

After Jennie Grey left him, Photograph Phil continued retouching pictures until the sun went down, when he locked up his apparatus in a huge chest in his wagon and adjourned to a hotel for his supper.

After he had satisfied his appetite, he spent an hour in making himself presentable, after which he started toward John Mason's parlor. For it was there he naturally expected to meet the impulsive, warm-hearted Virginian.

The family were at supper when the Boy Sleuth arrived at the cabin, but fair Jennie hastily arose and escorted Phil into the parlor, joy shining in her beautiful blue eyes.

Bill Greeland, miner, looked after the pair with evident satisfaction.

"The boy's a good 'un," he muttered, under his breath, "and the little gal will be all right in his

care. 'Twixt him and the dashing Sport the little beauty will be over ears in love ere she is aware of it. Well, well; she can't learn life's strange lesson much younger."

The miner seemed to take a fatherly interest in the young and winning Virginian. Or was it because the Sport had ordered it so?

Jennie conducted her visitor into the parlor with girlish triumph.

"Do be seated, and teach me the merry, merry art of taking photographs," she said, leading Phil to a sofa, and sitting down beside him. "I am all impatience to learn so desirable an art."

"There, I beg," Phil replied. "As I'm a live sinner, I actually forgot to bring along my book of instructions. Isn't it a shame? I will start now for it."

"No, you will do nothing of the kind, sir," Jennie said, decidedly. "If two young people cannot get along for an evening without instructions, they ought to be blackballed."

"Well, just as you say. Lead ahead upon anything from politics to love; from dry goods to mineral ore, and I will endeavor to instruct you to the best of my ability."

"Oh! you naughty boy! To be sure, what should I know about mineral ore, or politics, or—"

"Or love," Phil said for her. "That is a dainty subject to handle, so we will discard it."

"No, we won't!" replied Jennie firmly. "Love is the very subject. I love flowers and poetry, nice cats, fruit, sunshine and photographers, and—"

"And photographers?" Phil ejaculated, gradually becoming more and more amazed. "You don't really mean to—"

"Yes, I just mean to say that I love you!" the little minx cried, defiantly. "Now, say as much for yourself, if you dare!"

"Why! why—" Phil began, beginning to grow as red as a cherry, conscious that her saucy eyes were trying to peer into his—that her fair round hand had clasped his own.

The truth was he was in just such a fix as he had never been in before. He had always flattered himself that being gifted with plenty of cheek, he could not be easily abashed, but here this pretty little sprite had cornered him in her boldly, innocent and charming way, and was evidently hugely enjoying his blushes and confusion.

"There! there!" she said, the next minute, throwing her arms around his neck, and kissing him, "don't be scared a bit, for I don't mean half of it you know. I am one of the awfulest mndcaps you ever saw, and I do so love to tease anybody."

"And so you selected me for a victim, eh?" Phil managed to ask.

"Of course I did, you great good fellow. I knew I could mix you all up like molasses candy, the first glance I got of you, this afternoon. I knew you were the one I could amuse myself with, without being misconstrued, or risk being insulted."

"Well, since you have seemingly derived considerable amusement from my presence, you will perhaps be satisfied to let me take my departure," Phil said, a little seriously.

"No, you bet I won't!" the little minx, declared, emphatically. "After I have caged my bird, do you suppose I am going to be foolish enough to let him fly away from me? Not much!"

And she kept a grasp upon his coat-sleeve, in a prompt way.

"What do you mean to do with me?"

"Oh! hold you a prisoner for the best part of the evening. You see, Guardly is usually out 'til late, and aunty is going to call upon Mrs. Jones, and there will be no one here with me except that Mr. Jeff Harkins, as Mr. Greeland says he is going to the theater. I fear that man—my flesh creeps every time he looks at me with his cold steely eyes. He reminds me of my enemy, Lucas Alyne."

"Perhaps, he is the same, in disguise?" Photograph Phil, suggested, the thought coming readily to his mind and forming into words.

"Oh! sir, you do not deem that possible, do you?" Jennie asked, in alarm.

"It is quite possible, but not probable," Phil replied. "Anyhow, if you will be kind enough to allow me the privilege, I will act as your protector until your gallant and handsome lover returns."

"To whom do you refer, sir?"

"To the Sport—Rosebud Rob."

A quiet flush stole to Jennie's cheek as she heard the name.

"I don't know why you should call him my lover," she said, with a shy glance into his eyes. "I am a great deal indebted to the Sport, but am in no way bound to him. And I am sure I like you just a little the best."

"Pshaw! Why will you persist in giving me taffy?"

"There isn't the least bit of taffy in it," Jennie asserted, earnestly, her big blue eyes dilating; "I'm meaning every word I say, so help me John Rogers! Don't think me gone demented or trifling with you. If you was half a man, you wouldn't have let me do this much of the courtship."

"Phew! if you ain't a brick, I never saw one. But, since you will have courtship, my little irrepressible, I propose upon the spot."

"Propose that we get married?"

"Propose that we take a walk out in the early moonlight, and sip the fragrance of ambrosia from the cup of the moon."

"Oh, dear! fan me quick, or I shall faint—I know I shall!" the little Virginian cried, in much alarm.

"Oh, Mr. Phil! if you have any regard for my nerves, you will never start off so gushingly again."

And then she burst into a merry laugh, in which Phil joined her.

"You are incorrigible," he said.

"And you are a great bear," was her reply. "Why, I can pick out the smallest definition of a man in Virginia, and he can make love better by far than you."

"Then go and find him," Phil growled, rising with a view to departing.

"Well, where are you going now?"

"Home, Miss Inquisitiveness. Got any particular objections to offer?"

"Of course I have. Didn't I tell you I wanted you to spend the evening with me?"

"Oh, yes! I'd forgotten. Now, then, I'll sit down once more, and let's be sensible. Do you really care for me, as you said, Miss Grey?"

"Why, of course," she replied, nestling close to him. "Do you suppose I should have said so if I hadn't meant it? I do think ever so much of you, Phil, for I believe you are a nice, good boy."

"Thank you then, little sweetheart, for I already return your affection, and shall try to merit your warmest admiration."

"There! that was nice of you—that speech, Phil. It sounded grand!" the little witch-fairy exclaimed, in delight. "And now that we are lovers, say the rest—you know what—and then seal the betrothal with a kiss."

"Will you marry me, my pretty?" Phil asked, now in dead earnest.

"Of course I will, Phil, and you see if I don't make you a good and faithful, loving wife."

And it is unnecessary for us to remark that the lovers' compact was sealed with a kiss which caused volumes of joy for the two concerned.

Phil was justly proud of his new charge, and Jennie was content to know that his presence was all-desirable to her happiness.

"We are both rather young to get married, my pet," Phil remarked, "and yet—"

"Pshaw! we are not a bit too young, Phil. I believe in people starting early in life, and by striving together they can soon get a foothold with their fellows, so that by and by they will have enough to keep them comfortable in their old age."

"Jennie, you are a philosophic jewel, and a prize I would not part with for the world. You have but to name the day, and I'll be on hand."

"I'll think when I should like it to be, and let you know to-morrow, Phil. But it need not be put off long, and I feel assured we shall get along happily together, for I, on my part, have had a great deal of experience, and no doubt you have, too; so that I believe we shall, to use a nautical expression, succeed in weathering the shoals and breakers of life, and sail upon an open and peaceful sea."

"I am of the same opinion, dearest. You can depend upon my faithfulness. But, dearest, are your hand and heart free? Is not—"

"I am aware what you would say," she interrupted. "You would mention Rosebud Rob's name. He is not—never can be—anything to me since you and I have met. For, young lovers though we may be, Phil, I believe we are made for one another."

And Photograph Phil thought so, too, as he drew her within his strong arms, and covered her face with kisses.

He remained by her side, and they, as lovers will, talked over the prospects of a happy future, until the little parlor-clock struck ten, ushering in the coming of Miss Priscilla from Mrs. Jones's; then Phil kissed his little betrothed, and took his departure, promising to call the next day.

After he had gone, Jennie had to, of course, apprise Miss Priscilla of her new departure, and that estimable body, after chiding her heroine, went straight to Mr. Jefferson Harkins, *alias* the Reverend Lucas Alyne, with the intelligence.

His reverence swore, under his breath, and excusing himself from Miss Priscilla's presence, he resorted to the gulch street, in hopes of finding Jean, his son.

He was fortunate enough to meet that sorry-looking individual, rambling aimlessly about—a wreck of the sprucely-dressed villain he had been on coming to Cascade City, such a short time before.

"You're a cursed fine-looking specimen of humanity—you are!" the Reverend Lucas said, angrily. "Come aside, out of hearing—I want to see you. What spree have you been into now, that your eyes are all bunged up, and your nose is knocked out of plumb?"

"Oh! just my luck," the young villain growled. "I've been pounded and knocked about ever since I first came here. Just got into a skewrup, back here, with a veiled female, whom I tried to kiss, and she crippled my nose and one eye quicker'n no time. I tell you what—I'm goin' to pull for the East."

"Not yet. I have work for you to assist in, first—work which interests us both. We must bring matters to a focus, at once."

"Why—what's the matter? I thought you had a safe plan ahead?"

"It won't work now, for there is no time to be lost. The estate is liable to be snatched out of my hands at any minute."

"How?"

"The girl has engaged herself to be married to the young devil, who runs the picture place, down yonder."

"Phew! and how does this endanger our financial prospects?"

"Why, in this way. The papers which bound the children over to my care, had the provision that my guardianship ceases at the marriage of one or both."

"And they come into their property at the same time?"

"Exactly. So you see not a moment is to be lost, or the Virginian estate is gone, and we are beggars. That accursed Photograph Phil must be put out of the way and the girl abducted. It is our only chance."

"Good enough! Leave the artist to me, and I'll smash his skull so that he won't be able to make love again."

"Very well. When you have finished his case, leave a note to that effect in care of the barkeeper at Tony Ribleau's saloon, and linger about the gulch for further orders from me."

"What has become of the Sport, Rosebud Rob?"

"Gone in search of Diablo, the road-agent, they say. So he is safe out of the way, and there is nothing to prevent our working with success."

With this understanding the two villains separated, the Reverend Lucas going back toward Mason's cabin, while his son meandered to the first saloon to refresh himself out of a coin which his liberal-minded father had condescended to drop into his paw. For without a certain amount of stimulus in him, the young ruffian was without his usual courage—or ferocity.

We must again return to the Sport, who, awakening from his frightful dream, heard footsteps coming down the passage toward him.

He was uncertain if or not it were Jack Jillett, and he resolved to be on guard lest it should be a foe. Drawing his revolver, he crouched back into the darkest corner and waited.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, and then a shrill whisper:

"Sh! do not be scared; it is Jillett. Are you ready?"

"Before I answer I'll make sure," Rosebud Rob replied, and he turned a full stream of light upon the new-comer, who was indeed Jillett, with his mask off in his hand for the occasion.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he asked, coming forward with a laugh.

"Quite so. What news do you bring?"

"Good news. You must come with me and hide. It is just dawning day, and the men will soon be released from their cells to work in the mine. You must hide for the day; to-night we will work."

"Are the miners imprisoned?"

"At night, yes, or a few of them would make their escape. In the daytime I keep a close watch upon them."

"How about Diablo?"

"He is in the Temple of Bacchus, gambling with the Forty."

"Humph! to-morrow night at this time, he won't be there."

"Why not?"

"Because the Temple of Bacchus will be in flames, or, better still, in ashes."

"Maybe it will be all right, but the driving of the outlaws into the cave here will bother us more. But come along, and I will secrete you where you will not be molested."

Taking the lead, Jillett strode rapidly away up the passage, and closing the lantern-slide, Rosebud Rob followed in his steps. The passage was a trifle ascending, and in the course of twenty minutes they emerged into the secret mine—the same grand masterpiece of Nature, which Photograph Phil had entered previously, in company with the chief, Diablo.

The Sport was surprised at the strange tableau, and gazed around him as he passed across the sandy bottom of the basin with a great deal of interest. This was the mine, then, which Nugget Ned had given him (as related in Rosebud Rob). This the place where immense fortunes lay in the golden sands in under their feet.

Pausing a moment, Jillett related to the Sport the cause of the so-called moon-tide, and the whole working of the gates which flooded the mine with golden grains, which were brought along into one stream by a hundred gold-bearing tributaries, and finally, after settling in large deposits, was precipitated by means of hewn-out sluices into the mine. Some of the golden sand, of course, went over the cascade, and thus the miners of the cave-basin were getting ten ounces to the one of that of the gulch-diggers.

Passing across the basin to the rocky walls on the north, Jillett unlocked an iron door which led into a dungeon.

Pushing the Sport in first he entered after him, closing the door in his wake. They were now in total darkness, but the Sport relieved that by turning on the light from his lantern.

The dungeon was but a hole in the rocks with a door to it, being a shapeless affair, and inhabited by picks, shovels, and mining implements of every description.

A large cast-iron box, shaped like a trunk, stood in one corner, and to this Jillett directed the Sport's attention.

"That is the treasure-box and its contents include all of the cash and bullion taken from the bank, besides a large amount of gold taken from the mine."

"All right, I'll keep a good watch over it. By the way, is there anything to eat in this den?"

"Yes. I have provided you with meats and corn bread, in a basket, yonder. Now, good-day, keep quiet, and when it is time, I will release you."

And so saying, he took his departure, leaving the Sport alone in the cave—alone with the treasure.

The first thing he did was to tackle the edibles, which Jillett had thoughtfully provided for his use. He was exceedingly hungry, and, consequently, made a good hearty meal.

During the forenoon he heard the men working in the basin mine—heard the echoing reverberations of their picks and shovels, but the sound of no voice, except that of Jack Jillett, as he paced to and fro on guard.

In spirit Rosebud Rob was reckless.

He chafed at this confinement—longed to be abroad, in search of the one woman he now knew he

adored most—and that one was no other than brave and courageous, self-sacrificing Baltimore Bess.

The dream constantly reverted to his thoughts, and naturally increased his anxiety.

"What a blind idiot I was to refuse her, when she would have so joyfully grasped at the chance to become mine, and make me happy! Why did I not accept her—why could I not see as I see now, that she, of all women was the one for me? God knows if anything should happen that we should not meet again in this life, I should be the most miserable devil in existence."

The day passed slowly, to the, as it were, imprisoned Sport. It was gloomy in the cheerless cave, even with his lantern lit, and he longed for night to come, and with it action.

Night at last began to fall, as he ascertained by peering through the keyhole out into the basin, and by the cessation of the ringing of picks and shovels.

Then came a long blank, during which, for several hours, he could hear no sound of human presence in the basin.

Then, came ringing footsteps, the door was hastily thrown open, and there stepped suddenly into the presence of the Sport—*Diablo, the Terrible!*

CHAPTER XII.

PHIL'S EXPERIMENT—DEATH OF BESS—CONCLUSION.

THERE could be no mistake about it being the robber chief. Rosebud Rob had heard him often described, and the tall, waving plume in his hat bespoke that he was a chief, or at least an officer of rank in the outlaw band.

As he stepped within the cell Rosebud had involuntarily stepped to one side of the entrance, so that he was not immediately seen—not until he made an agile leap upon the intruder and bore him to the ground.

Then there was an instantaneous grappling of the two men and a fierce struggle for the mastery—a struggle between two powerful, determined men who were desperately resolved to win or die in the attempt—who knew that one of their lives must necessarily pay the forfeit.

Over and over they rolled in a desperate hug; neither could draw or use a weapon; the victor must eventually be the man who possessed the greater amount of endurance.

Twisting, panting, squirming about, they continued to struggle, neither speaking or showing signs of weakening.

It was a strange tableau there in the streaming light of the Sport's lantern to see two strong men engaged in a death-hug, working for a doubtful victory.

The Sport could have shot the chieftain down upon his entrance easily enough, but chose rather to capture him and let him expiate his crimes through the stern code of Black Hills justice.

Over and over they rolled, endeavoring to dash each other against the rocky projections in order to produce insensibility. But their efforts seemed unavailing, and thus the struggle continued.

Finally the mask of Diablo became loosened and torn off, and the stream of light from the Sport's lantern fell full upon the undisguised chieftain's face.

Rosebud Rob uttered a cry of consternation and surprise at sight of it.

What could this mean? Could the dead return to life?

For the face was that of Joaquin Muriete—Joaquin, whom the Sport had last seen lying dead in the great cavern north-west of Cascade City, as related in "Idyl, the Girl Miner."

Yet here he lay locked in the grasp of the Sport! Rosebud Rob could scarcely credit his senses.

"Joaquin Muriete, can it be possible this is you?" he gasped, as for a moment there was a cessation in their struggles. "Did I not see you lying in death beside your wife in the great cavern?"

"You saw me in a state of unconsciousness that, no doubt, resembled death, but was not," Joaquin replied. "I awoke after a while, buried my wife, and came hither with the sole purpose of reaping riches and a sweet revenge upon you."

"Why upon me?" Rosebud Rob demanded.

"Because I hated you—because you had the secret of the existence of this mine. I intended to destroy you, but now—"

"Now," said Rosebud Rob, "it is nip and tuck which wins."

The words were the starting point for a new struggle. Both clinched harder, and worked desperately for the victory. Over, over and over they went, straining to break each other's hold—working to crush each other, or dash one another's head against the rocks.

At last Rosebud Rob heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and his courage was heightened, for he recognized the step as that of Jack Jillett. A moment later the renegade outlaw came bounding into the dungeon, and he uttered a cry of surprise as he beheld the two men writhing upon the floor.

"Great Heaven! Joaquin!" he gasped, standing aghast.

"Yes, Joaquin," the Sport replied. "Help me to secure him."

Jillett obeyed in silence. He first secured Joaquin, Jr.'s feet, and then his arms and wrists were broken from their clasp, and bound.

Then Rosebud Rob arose to his feet, not a little sore and stiff as a result of his long struggle. Diablo lay upon the rocky floor of the cell, cursing like a trooper.

"Gag him, or do something to stifle his yells," Rosebud Rob directed, and Jillett tied a handker-

chief over the captured outlaw's mouth, which had the desired effect.

Diablo was nearly purple with rage, when he found that he was a prisoner and deprived of his power of speech. The tables were fairly turned upon him.

"How have you got matters arranged elsewhere?" Rosebud Rob asked. "Are we in danger of being surprised?"

"No! Every man of the Infernal Forty is drugged to stupefaction and securely bound."

"Where are they?"

"In the mine here, whither I dragged them one by one."

"How came Diablo—or Joaquín—here?"

"I know not. He was not in the Temple, and I came hither in search of him. Lucky it was I came in time, or you'd have been stiff by this time."

"True enough, and I have you to thank for my life," Rosebud Rob said, earnestly. "Now, the question is, how shall we get our treasure and our prisoners into Cascade City?"

"Easily enough, only we shall have to make two trips. There is a passage leading out of the mine to the entrance I spoke of, near where Joaquín's toll-gate once stood. In the passage are five mules on whom we can load several of the prisoners, and the treasure-box. What do you say to setting the miners free, as they were compulsory servants of Diablo?"

"I leave that to your judgment," Rosebud Rob replied. "But, come! let's hurry up with this job, for other work demands my attention."

"Very well, remain here and guard the chief, and I will go for the mules," Jillett said, after which he departed.

He was gone about ten minutes, when he returned, leading five pack-mules.

The Sport had, in the meantime, dragged Diablo out of the cell, and left him in the vicinity of his captured confederates, while he went back after the treasure-chest and succeeded in dragging that out, as Jillett arrived.

The work of loading up now began. The iron chest being heavy was assigned as the burden of one mule.

Some twenty of the prisoners, including Diablo, were then tied in a line or lashed to the remaining mules.

"You had best set out for Cascade City alone," said Jillett, "while I remain here to guard the other prisoners. All you have to do is to follow the mules, and they will lead you into the passage, which you follow to the end, in the face of a wall of rock. Search about the floor at the foot of this wall, and you will find an iron foot-spring that, when you step upon it, will cause the walls to part for the space of a couple of minutes, when they will glide together again. A spring on the outside will serve to open them for you on your return."

"You will remain here?"

"Yes, as there is one who might come and release the rest of these fellows, should I leave them alone."

"To whom do you allude?"

"To one Millicent Vere, who is the affianced bride of this Diablo."

"Ah! I have heard of her. Well, you remain here, and I will soon return with a posse of Vigilantes at my back."

And with these words Rosebud Rob set out in the rear of his mule train, which was connected together by lariats.

By following them and Jillett's directions, he was soon out upon the toll-road, and proceeding toward Cascade City.

The night was not moonless, nor was it particularly light. Upon glancing at his watch, as he descended the bluffs into the gulch, the Sport found that it was two o'clock, A. M.

The town had mostly quieted down, very few persons being abroad.

The first persons Rosebud met were Schuyler, the president of the late bank, and Bill Greeland, the losing miner.

Both stopped short, as they met the Sport with his cargo of gold and human freight.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rob, "it's I, with the fruits of capture. I have all of Diablo's treasure, and some of his men, including himself. What shall we do with them, for I am in a hurry and wish to return for the rest of the robbers, whom I left bound and in charge of one Jillett, who assisted me in the capture?"

"Then leave this caravan in our charge, with the assurance that we will care for it promptly," said Greeland. "The bank will make a first-class prison, for the present."

Rosebud Rob readily assented, and leaving matters in their hands, he hurried off through the gulch in search of those citizens who had formed themselves into a vigilance committee. Soon collecting a half-dozen men, he set out once more for the secret cavern.

Entering the secret passage from the toll-road, they traversed it until they debouched into the basin-mine.

Here a great surprise awaited them—especially, the Sport.

The prisoners whom he had left in charge of Jillett were gone, while the renegade outlaw lay in their place, with several bullet-holes in his forehead—dead!

"By Heaven! they are gone!" Rosebud Rob said. "Was the Temple of Bacchus burned to-night, Le-lion?"

"Yes; the flames had but died out when you arrived in the gulch, Sport."

"Then these outlaws, aided by a woman, have made their escape. Let us look to the cabins."

An examination was made, which resulted in the discovery that not only had the outlaws escaped, but the imprisoned miners had been liberated and were gone.

A thorough search of the strange cavern resulted no better. The outlaws were all gone, or so securely hidden that they could not be found.

"There is no use of our looking further," Rosebud Rob said, at last. "The woman, Millicent Vere, has beaten my game when I held a sure hand."

"And the sooner we get out of here, the better!" cried one of the Vigilantes.

"Lookie hayr, will ye?" and directing the light upon the ground, he enabled them each to behold a copious trail of giant powder, running from one center in a score of directions.

Every face suddenly was possessed of a white, scared look, except that of the Sport. Outwardly he was as cool as the proverbial cucumber.

"True enough," he said, grimly—"a plot is on foot to blow us up, and it only remains for us to make a run of it."

And they did make a run of it.

Taking to the passage through which they had entered, they started off at the top of their speed, and succeeded in getting out upon the highway, near where Joaquín's cottage had stood.

And not a moment too soon!

There was suddenly a tremendous jarring of the ground, beneath their feet, as if an earthquake had come upon them—then, a roar as of a hundred wide-mouthed cannons.

The blow-up of the mine, had no visible effect upon the country above it. The cavernous basin was so deep, that only the jar was felt in the outer world.

"We have had a narrow escape, pilgrims, and I think we have reason to be thankful," Rosebud Rob said, with a shudder. "I pity any one that was alive within that secret mine, when she blew up."

"Hayr too," assented one of the Vigilantes. "Thar'd be a poor show fer any mortal in thet explosion, you bet your top boots."

The mine being worthless, now, and the outlaws escaped, nothing remains for us but to return to town," the Sport said. "There at least, we have a few victims in the hands of the law."

Accordingly they returned, over the rugged stage-road, and descended into the golden gulch just as the first streak of day-dawn touched upon the far eastern horizon of lofty peaks.

Photograph Phil, after leaving the cabin of the Masons, returned to his "schooner" wagon in the gulch, where he usually slept.

He was feeling by far happier and more appreciative of the world and things worldly than he had earlier in the evening.

Crawling into his vehicle upon a couch of skins, he dropped off into a light nap, from which he awoke in about an hour. But in that hour he dreamt that danger was menacing Jennie Grey.

Peering out of the wagon, he saw that the gulch was nearly deserted. Mason's cabin was dark and wrapped in slumber to all appearances.

"I must now to my work," the young artist muttered. "The building must be burned according to the Sport's direction."

Arming himself with a can of kerosene oil, which he carried among his effects, he left the wagon and dodged about in the shadows of the gulch shanties until he came to the robbers' nest, known as the Temple of Bacchus.

Reconnoitering, to find that there was no one in the immediate vicinity, he proceeded to saturate the walls with the inflammable oil.

As soon as he had accomplished this, he set fire to some old grass that would communicate with the building, and then skulked away to his wagon.

In ten minutes the "Temple" was wrapped in flames, and the cry of fire which sounded through the gulch had the effect of bringing out a large crowd. But as soon as the place had burned to the ground, they all crawled back to rest, and the gulch was deserted.

About an hour before daybreak Phil was lying in a semi-drowse, when somebody pulled the curtains of his wagon, and an excited voice called to him:

"Mr. Phil, come up to the cabin, for heaven's sake! Something awful has happened."

He recognized the voice as that of his betrothed, Jennie Grey, and he was out by her side in an instant.

"What is it, Jennie? Tell me."

"Oh! Phil, it is awful! We have just found Mr. Mason lying in his cellar, his head split open with an ax, and his money has been stolen."

Photograph Phil uttered an exclamation of horror.

"By gracious! this is awful, true enough! When did you discover the crime?"

"Just a bit ago, when I went into the cellar for some articles for an early breakfast. Oh! Phil, Miss Priscilla is nearly distracted."

"Poor woman! It is a sad blow. Wait a moment and I will accompany you back to the cabin."

He crept back into the wagon, armed himself, and then went with sweet Jennie to the miner's cabin.

Although it was approaching daylight, and the town was yet asleep, many had heard of the shocking murder, and had flocked to the cabin.

The body of the murdered miner had already been brought from the cellar, and laid upon a lounge. He had received a blow with a sharp ax in the back part of the head, which had nearly cleft the skull in twain. It was truly a horror of horrors.

"In God's name, who can have committed this ghastly crime?" Photograph Phil exclaimed, as he viewed the work, surrounded by the weeping friends of the dead man.

But no one seemed able to answer the momentous question.

Whoever was the guilty wretch, he had struck a sure blow, and stolen away with the gold for which he had stained his hands in human blood.

Miss Priscilla was inconsolable, and Jennie was overcome with genuine grief, for she had become greatly attached to the sturdy, honest miner.

By daylight the news of the crime had spread throughout the town, and though crowds came none were admitted, except a few friends.

Rosebud Rob and Bill Greeland viewed the body, sorrowfully. Both had grown to esteem him, and it was a sad sight to behold him lying so cold and silent in death.

As soon as practicable, Rosebud Rob sought out Photograph Phil, and found him talking to Jennie in the parlor.

Both came forward to meet the handsome Sport—Phil with a guilty flush on his cheek, and Jennie rosy with blushes.

But, much to Phil's relief, the Sport said nothing of their being together—rather, spoke of the crime.

"What do you think about it?" Rosebud Rob asked. "Do you suppose the murderer has fled the town?"

"No, I do not; and John Mason being dead, I dare say he will come here to-day!"

"Ha! then you think you know the guilty man?"

"That I cannot tell even you, Mapleton," the Boy Sleuth said—"not at present, anyhow. Wait, and if the right man comes, I will endeavor to prove my suspicions of him."

Under the supervision of the two young men, John Mason's body was taken to the parlor and robed for burial after which all but the family were locked out of the dead-room.

Many of the townspeople, however, lingered about the cabin, and a spirit of the revengeful was rife among them.

Mason had ever been a first and foremost citizen, and dark were the threats of the people against the murderer.

About noon Reverend Lucas Alyne presented him self at the cabin, in his disguise as Jeff Harkins.

The moment Photograph Phil saw him, he nodded to the Sport.

"That's the man, ten to one," he whispered. "Do you know him?"

Rosebud Rob shook his head.

"No! Who is he?"

"His name is Lucas Alyne."

"What! that man Lucas Alyne?"

"Sh! Yes, it is he, in disguise. Keep still, and leave all to me. First, let us see what he has to say."

The disguised minister paid not the slightest attention to either Phil or our Sport, but went to Miss Priscilla, and offered her comfort in a few well-chosen words, after which he proceeded into the parlor and viewed the body. When he came out he was a shade whiter, and evidently somewhat agitated.

There were quite a number of people in the cabin, and glancing around, he said:

"My friends, this is a sad affliction which has visited us in the death of Mr. Mason, whom I knew to be a good man, although we were not friends, exactly. You may, some of you, remember me as the Reverend Lucas Alyne, for this beard I wear is merely false. I had to adopt the disguise in order to be near my ward here, who was cruelly taken from me and placed in Mr. Mason's charge. Now that the poor man is dead, I am sure that none of you present can object to returning her to my loving care."

And, as he finished speaking, the reverend rascal removed his false hair and beard, and stood forth in his true colors.

"Ay! I object!" Photograph Phil cried, springing to his feet. "I object, and give two reasons: one of them is, that Miss Grey here"—and as he spoke he drew Jennie to his side—"is my betrothed wife. Another—her father and own natural guardian has just turned up, and will assume her protection."

A cry of surprise came from all—a joyous exclamation from Jennie—a baffled oath from Lucas Alyne.

"It is a lie—a base plot to rob me of my ward!" he cried, fiercely. "Do not believe them, my friends. They are conspiring against me—against justice and the Lord. I appeal to you—I appeal to you!"

"Do not use the name of the Lord in this case, Lucas Alyne," Photograph Phil said, sternly. "For you to pretend piety any longer, is out of all reason. If you so desire, I can produce William Grey, the father of the young lady here."

"'Tis false! I defy you to produce him, you young Philistine! William Grey is long since dead!"

"You err!" said Bill Greeland, the miner, as he too stepped forward, and pulled a mass of bushy false beard from his face. "Look you, Lucas Alyne—I am the man!"

The defeated guardian staggered back.

"You—you!" he gasped, his eyes glaring wildly.

"Yes I!" said the handsome elderly miner. "After all your devilish scheming for wealth, Lucas Alyne, I have survived to wrest one of my children from you!" and as Jennie flew to his embrace the returned wanderer clasped her fondly to him.

Lucas Alyne, purple with passion, turned toward the door. But the Sport and the young Sleuth instantly blocked his path.

"You will pardon us," Photograph Phil said, slipping a pair of handcuffs upon the wrists of the confounded man, quickly, with Rosebud's help, "but we beg to detain you upon the suspicion that you are the murderer of John Mason. Perhaps we are wrong, but I choose to try an experiment, which will either vindicate or convict you. Ladies and

gentleman, if you will be patient, I will return soon."

And so saying, he left the shanty. Great was the excitement among those within. Excusing himself, William Grey took Jennie to a hotel, where more fully they could understand the happiness of their glad reunion.

Photograph Phil soon returned to the miner's shanty, bearing a tiny camera or photographing instrument. This he took into the parlor, where lay the dead body of John Mason.

The others followed him, curious, and excited, and Rosebud Rob also marched the prisoner into the room.

Alyne was now ghastly white, and trembling in every limb.

Photograph Phil went calmly at his work. He placed his camera upon a pedestal, at the foot of the improvised bier, after which he propped up the body to a sitting posture. He next opened the eyelids of the dead man, so that the glassy balls were revealed, and then turned to the wondering and excited spectators.

"What I now propose to do," he said, "is to photograph the pupil of the dead man's eye. You all probably know that the last object a dying man's eyes rest upon, before life becomes extinct, is indelibly photographed on the pupil of his eye. By taking a photograph of the pupil, after death, you can reproduce that object as naturally as though taken from life. It is an art I once learned in the East, and have used several times in convicting murderers. I will now proceed with my work!"

Lucas Alyne at this juncture gasped for breath, and fell on the floor, where he lay, panting, his eyes glaring with insane desperation.

Phil went calmly at his work, and in the course of ten minutes he produced a tin type from his machine, and retired with some chemicals to a dark room to finish it. Not long was it before he returned, and gravely passed it around for inspection.

Many were the exclamations as those in the room gazed upon the faint but distinct picture, for it was the face of Jeff Harkins, alias Reverend Lucas Alyne.

The murderer of John Mason was lynched that night at sundown, in the presence of a large concourse of people, and at the same time Diablo, otherwise Joaquin Jr., and those of the Infernal Forty who had been captured, were launched into eternity.

It was the biggest hanging ever seen in the Black Hills country, and to-day, many a miner who was present can tell you much more than I can of the horrors of the 'last hoist.'

That night Rosebud Rob and Photograph Phil paid a visit to William Grey and his daughter, and were gladly received, though of course Phil was the recipient of the lion's share of pretty Jennie's attention.

While they were passing away the evening a note came for Rosebud Rob in the handwriting of Baltimore Bess. It made his heart beat faster as he caught sight of the beloved handwriting, but he quickly grew deathly white, and a groan of anguish escaped his lips.

The note read:

"MR. MAPLETON:—Will you come to me? I am dying, and want to see you once more before I cross the river to eternity. I am at Mrs. Lyoniel's."

"Your loving Bess, alias PAULINE GREY."

"My God! Can it be true?" the Sport cried, bursting into tears. "I will not believe it until I see for myself."

Seizing his hat, he rushed from the room, leaving the note behind him. Mr. Grey picked it up, and as he saw it he groaned aloud.

"My heaven, Jennie!" he gasped. "It is from your sister—from long-lost Paulie! Dying! dying! Oh! God forbid! Philip—quick, boy! Guide us to the place where we shall find our darling."

Rosebud Rob was the first to reach Mrs. Lyoniel's, and he rushed up-stairs to the room he had formerly occupied. Opening the door, he softly entered. Mrs. Lyoniel was crouching by the bedside, and a physician stood near by, looking very grave.

Bess was lying upon the bed, deathly white, but still possessed of consciousness, for a glad smile came to her face as the Sport came forward.

"Oh! I am so glad!" she said, in a low, sweet voice—"so glad you have come to see me, Rosebud. I was afraid you would get here too late, or would not come at all."

"Bess, my darling, do you think that I could have staid away? Bess, what cruel fate was it that caused me to scorn your love, when you are the dearest object of my life? You are not dying, my treasure? Oh! for God's sake, tell me that you are not dying!" The Sport, strong, self-controlled man that he was, broke down utterly, and sobbed out his anguish—his repentance of one sad mistake—his regret that was insatiate.

"Don't cry, Rob," Bess said, taking his hands in hers—"don't cry, dear. 'Tis for the best that the Lord has summoned me to Him. My life here below has been productive of very little actual good, although I always strove to sin not, and am happy to die, Rob, if you do care for me after all."

"Care for you, Bess? Can you doubt it?"

"No, I believe you, dear. If I could have known it before—but—but, it is too late. I could not live and see you wedded to another, and so I threw myself into a quarrel, and got a knife-wound in my side."

"Who did the deed, Bess? Tell me who did it, that I may hound him to the death he has bespoken for you."

"You would do this, Rosebud?" she interrogated, brightening up.

"I swear it, Bess!"

"Then, it was Jean Alyne. Did Jennie tell you her story, Rob?"

"Yes; and you, Bess—"

"Am the sister who fled from the cruel guardianship of Lucas Alyne, in pursuit of a recreant lover. I—I thought I loved him, until I met you. Then the whole bubble burst, and I realized the truth that it was you I had been fated to love."

"This recreant lover was Mark Manners, eh?"

"The same. Ah! it is growing dark, my darling. Won't you light the lamp so that I can see you?"

"The lamp is lit, Bess," the Sport replied, in a choked voice, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Ah! then this is death that obscures my sight. Bend nearer—there," and she threw her arms about his neck and drew his face closer to hers. "I can see you for the last time. Thank God! I was afraid I could not see you. Kiss me, Rob."

The Sport obeyed, covering her lips and forehead with passionate caresses. He saw she was going very fast, and partly raised her in his arms, so that her head rested against his shoulder.

The change seemed to relieve her, and she appeared content.

Both the physician and Mrs. Lyoniel knelt in silent prayer by the bedside, while, convulsed with grief, the Sport held his darling to his breast, and watched her life-tide ebb away, while came to him the realization that the dearest hope of his aching heart was doomed to float away from his grasp, where it could never, never be recalled to this life.

She rallied a little once more, as if she would prolong life for the knowledge that one man loved her, and that he held her close to his heart. For the full dawning of their love was with the going out of the life of Bess.

"You will soon join me in the better world, darling!" she murmured, her eyes gazing lovingly into his.

"God grant it so, dear Bess!" he replied, softly kissing her.

Then turning to the physician, he asked:

"Doctor, are you sure there is no hope—no hope at all?"

"Positive!" was the low reply. "She has not bled externally, you see."

"No! there is no hope," Bess replied, seeming to have caught their words. "I am dying. Ah!—dark—now! Oh, look! the sun has burst from the clouds, and—and—kiss me good-by, Robbie!"

He kissed for the last time in her earthly career the lips that were growing cold, and softly her life went out, leaving a sweet half-smile and expression of peaceful joy upon her features.

Baltimore Bess was dead!

Dead!—just a moment before the door opened and William Grey and Jennie, accompanied by Photograph Phil, entered the room—too late!

Our work lacks but a little of completion.

The next day was truly a day of mourning in Cascade City, for both Bess and the dead miner, John Mason, had many friends in the golden gulch.

Both funerals were attended by large assemblages, and when the sun set over the western mountain-crests, its dying light shone upon two fresh-made graves upon the slopes, wherein reposed two true and faithful hearts—two beings that had died by the assassin's hand, but were surely given a welcome by Him whose

Power is mighty,
And whose love is Infinite.

Later, William Grey left the mines for his Virginia home, accompanied by Jennie and Photograph. For his services in recovering the stolen treasure, large compensations were offered Rosebud Rob, but he declined them all, stating that he had enough of this world's wealth to carry him through, or, at least, to satisfy his wants.

A grief-stricken man, he shortly after left Cascade City in search of Jean Alyne, with but one object in view—that he might survive long enough to avenge the death of Bess.

The gold stolen by Lucas Alyne from John Mason's cellar, was found in the villain's room at the hotel, and restored to poor Miss Priscilla.

It is not improbable that the Virginia papers may ere long herald the nuptials of Jennie and Phil, for, though their love making was sudden and youthful, their hearts are still bound together in the strong bond of true affection.

The outlaws who escaped from Diablo's stronghold, aided, as was supposed, by Millicent Vere, have never been heard of since, much to the relief of the few souls who still toil for gold in Cascade Gulch.

And shall we surprise any to announce that "Bully Ike of the 663rd Congressional district" has taken to himself a wife, and now is 'mayor' of the town?

Let us write here:

THE END.

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